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BURT BUNKER,

THE TRAPPER.

A TALE OF THE NORTHWEST HUNTING-GROUNDS.

BY CHARLES E. LASALLE

NEW YORK:
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BY CHARLES H. LAVILLE

BURT BUNKER, THE TRAPPER

CHAPTER I

A LIGHT ON THE PRAIRIE.

OLD Burt Bunker had roamed the prairies and mountains for thirty years, and had seen many strange sights, animals and men, and his had been the lot to be the hero of many a thrilling adventure ; but that upon which his eye was now fixed was the greatest mystery of his life, and he found himself totally at a loss to understand what it all meant.

It was a starlit night, with no moon, so that the keenest vision of man could not penetrate far upon the prairie. Old Burt was mounted upon his faithful stallion, Honeycomb, and was on his way toward the trapping grounds and beaver-runs of the Yellowstone. He was all alone with his horse, without even so much as a dog to keep him company. He had lain by during the day, on account of "powerful signs" of the Blackfeet, and when night came down upon the prairie, he mounted his animal again and rode forward, both rider and beast knowing the route so well that there was no fear of their going astray on this quiet autumn night.

Burt was riding dreamily forward, his animal at a moderate gait, while he was smoking his short black pipe, when he detected far ahead on the plain, a tiny point of light, which, at first glimpse, he concluded was a star low down in the horizon ; but, as his horse continued straight toward it, he gradually awoke to the fact that it was also coming toward him. Finally he reined up his horse for the purpose of examining it.

Now that he was stationary himself, he could see that it was moving, which showed that it was carried by some person or animal. It had a dancing, flickering appearance, which, while it showed it was constantly changing its position, showed also that it was not carried in the hand of a person, so that

it could scarcely be a lantern, borne by some ignorant way-farer in this part of the world.

"Skulp me—but that *is* quar!" muttered Burt, after he had contemplated it several minutes in silent wonderment. "I've never see'd that kind of creetur' in these parts afore."

Brave as was the trapper, there was a vein of superstition that ran through his being, as is often the case with a daring but ignorant man, and a shiver shook his Herculean frame, as he reflected that this might be some supernatural creation, wandering over the western prairies. By the camp-fire and in the settlements he had heard strange, wild tales of indescribable beings, a glimpse of whom had been detected as they whisked with the speed of the wind over the prairie.

"Mebbe it's one of 'em!" he growled, a minute later, "and ef it's so, thar ain't no use in p'intin' Betsey Jane at it."

This female personage, we may explain, was the appellation which the old trapper always applied to his rifle. Indeed, there seemed to be a tinge of poetry or romance in his nature, which cropped out in the appellations he gave to different objects.

He had instinctively drawn his rifle from over his shoulder, at the moment of reining up his horse, and he now sat grasping it with both hands, so as to hold it ready for instant use.

"Betsey Jane," he added, as he looked lovingly down at the deadly weapon, "you and me have tramped many a mile together, and you've let daylight into enough red-skins to make a stack as high as the Big Mound, and the rule has been when you barked somebody or somethin' has bit the airth; but I'mafeard you've met more nor your match."

The trapper looked furtively about him, as if seeking some place to which he could retreat, but he saw none. He was in the middle of a broad, level stretch of prairie, and he knew, circumscribed as was his vision, that there was no water or timber within miles.

"I can't hide," he continued, giving utterance to his reflections, "for any creetur' that's got an eye like that can see *any whar*; and ef I should get behind a tree, he'd come and look right through it at me. Skulp me! but it's comin' right toward me."

Whatever doubt there might be about the former conclusion

of the hunter, there could be no questioning the truth of the latter. That strange, dancing light, that had first attracted his notice, was speeding directly toward him, and, in a few minutes more at the furthest, would be upon him ; so it only remained for Burt to put the best face possible on the matter and brave it out.

"I'd rather meet a stack of red-skins," he fairly gasped, as his horse walked slowly forward, "than to meet *you*!"

As the best he could do, the trapper determined to face the coming danger, and, if really a "spook," he would make tracks when that was the only horn of the dilemma remaining for him to take.

"They say *sperits* don't make no noise," soliloquized Burt, as he caught the clamp of a horse's feet upon the prairie.

Cautiously listening, while his own animal stood still, he could hear its steady approach, and by and by was able to discover the outlines of a horse, with some sort of figure astride of it. The same starlike glimmer was discernible, advancing steadily, until he saw that the terrible object possessed the real shape and contour of a man.

But what meant that red, fiery eye ? Could any thing mortal possess such a peculiarity ?

The trapper was more terrified than ever, and really believed that his end was near at hand ; and at the same time he could not help reflecting that if he should possibly be spared to get out of this, what a terrible tale he would have to tell among the settlements and around the camp-fire.

"Hello dar ! who's dat ?"

This came from the mysterious thing, and it was addressed unmistakably to Burt, who was inexpressibly relieved at finding he was dealing with a veritable human being, albeit there was still something unexplainable in his appearance. The horse of the stranger had halted, and it was plain that he had caught sight of the trapper for the first time.

The latter once more grasped Betsey Jane. His confidence in his rifle was restored.

"I say, stranger, who mought you be ?"

"It's me—me ; don't be skeart !" was the reply, in such a tremulous tone as to show that the speaker himself was excessively frightened.

"Who mought you be?"

"Me—me; Pomp Augustus Brown."

"What in thunder is the matter with your wool? Has somebody set it afire?" demanded the indignant hunter, as he rode toward the trembling negro, who expected assuredly that his life would pay the penalty of frightening the grizzled old prairie veteran so terribly.

"Dat yer whar dis chile allers carries his lantring; I put i up dar, whar it's out ob de way."

"That's a leetle ahead of any thing this chap ever see'd," muttered Burt, partly to himself, as he contemplated this novel arrangement of the darky. The latter was a short, heavy-set fellow, with huge, rolling eyes, which, on a closer approach, almost rivaled the bull's-eye lantern itself.

"What do you want of that thing, anyway?" asked the trapper, after he was enabled to comprehend it.

"Dat's to see wid."

"What be yer lookin' fur?"

"Our folks; dey's lost."

"I should think you war the one as war lost; who do yer b'long to, and what ar' yer doin' hyar?"

"I b'longs to Cunnel Mulford, and I's lookin' fur his darter Olive and me mudder, Polly Brown."

After considerable questioning, Burt got the truth from the negro, who allowed himself to be persuaded that his life was not in imminent peril.

Colonel Mulford, whom he had heard of as an Indian agent, had erected his home—or rather a temporary resort—some miles away from this place, near a beautiful grove of timber. As his daughter, Olive, had manifested some signs of failing health, he had erected a small, unpretending cabin, in which he removed her, with the intention of permitting her to spend a year or so there, he having received immense advantage himself from the pure, bracing air.

Her mother being dead, she was accompanied by two faithful servants, Polly, a tall, muscular, angular negress, some forty odd years of age, a widow, with a huge, good-natured son, generally known as "Pomp," although, as we have shown in another place, he was the owner of a somewhat more extensive title.

Colonel Mulford, being an Indian agent, it may be supposed that he knew too much to place his beautiful and beloved daughter in personal danger. He selected this site, not alone for the purity of its atmosphere, but on account of a spring of water, that possessed considerable medicinal qualities, and from which he himself had derived no little benefit. This was the great inducement.

Furthermore, it was removed from any immediate danger, as his own agency was the nearest point to which the Indians generally came; but there remained that ever-present danger, peculiar to the American Indian, and resulting from his roving disposition. There was no telling whither their nomadic propensities would lead them, as they have a weakness of using the entire West as their parade ground; but her visibly failing health decided him to take her with him. His position as Indian agent brought him into such intimate connection with the adjoining tribes, that he was quite confident he could forestall any hostile movement upon their part.

But Colonel Mulford, like many other men, committed a sad blunder, the worst of which was that he could know nothing of it until in all probability it was too late.

On the afternoon of this day, Olive Mulford was taking her usual ride over the prairie, accompanied by Pomp and his mother, all of them mounted upon horses. They had made a circuit of several miles, and halted in a small grove, somewhat similar to the one in which their house was located. The air was quite cool, and Olive decided to kindle a fire.

Pomp went ranging through the grove in search of fuel, and had scarcely got beyond sight of his friends, when a party of Indian horsemen swooped down upon them, seized Olive, and her servant, Molly, and were off with them like a shot.

Fearful of pursuit, the red-skins did not pause to secure the other member of the party, but took the two females and their animals, and were gone as rapidly as they came. Pomp heard the sound of their horses' feet, and the outcries of the women, and got back just in time to see them vanishing over the prairie.

It was now growing dark, and very naturally Pompey was taken all aback at this catastrophe. He took fully an hour

to decide what he should do, if, indeed, he could do any thing at all. Entirely unacquainted with the ways of the prairie Indians, he concluded that his mother and missus would soon be set free, when they would set out for home, and would be very likely to get lost without his assistance. So he "fired up" the little "bull's eye" lantern, which he always carried with him in his travels, and set out to search for them, which brings us back again to old Burt, the trapper.

"I reckon you hain't lived in these parts long," said the latter, after he had patiently listened to the story of the negro.

"Not wery," was the reply.

"Wal, the fust thing you do is to snuff out that 'ere conflagration in yer wool; such a trick as that is a sure sign of a thunderin' fool."

"But—but how will de folks see me?" asked Pomp, as he tremblingly obeyed.

"That won't help 'em any, and it'll be likely to draw a red-skin's bullet smack and clean through that skull of your'n."

The negro did as commanded, and then, as the two horse-men sat side by side, he asked :

"What dis chile do?"

"Whar's the curnel?"

"At de Beaver River Agency; know whar dat is?"

"Yes; it's 'bout forty miles from hyar. The best thing yer kin do is to strike a bee-line fur home, and tell him what the red varmints have been doin'."

"But I don'no' de way."

"Come 'long then with me; I'm goin' purty near it, and I'll take you nigh 'nough fur yer to find it."

"Does yer know Curnel Mulford?"

"I've heerd of him; they say he's a good and just agent, and the Lord knows them kind of individooals is skarce 'nough to make me feel like ridin' forty miles to see such a cur'osity."

"Den you'll go wid me?" asked the joyful darky.

But the trapper shook his head.

"It's gettin' late in the fall, and I'm two weeks later nor I war last year, and I obsarve that it feels like snow in the air now. I hain't got the time, Woolly Head, fur I ought to been at the beaver runs a month ago. Howsumever, I'll take yer as near as I kin; so come on."

They had hardly started, when the keen-eyed trapper discovered a bright light in the west. He scanned it closely a moment, and then asked :

" Which way does yer cabin lay from yer ?"

" Off dar, whar de moon is arozin'."

" That ain't the moon," replied Burt ; " that's yer house, itself gettin' *riz* so high, that you won't be able to tell where it stood, to-morrer."

" Golly !" gasped Pomp, scarcely able to realize the full extent of the loss, " dat yer's orful ; I've got a new pair ob trowsers in dat house, an' what's goin' to 'come ob dem ?"

" Lucky yer ain't in the trowsers ; it's gettin' late ; come on."

Both were mounted upon good animals, and they struck into a rapid canter, which bore them swiftly forward toward the north-west. This was the direction leading to the beaver runs of the Yellowstone, and so desirous was the trapper of making his way to these perilous regions, that he would permit nothing to draw him aside from his object. The abduction of Olive Mulford was a case that powerfully appealed to his sympathies, and he had never yet turned a deaf ear to the cause of imperiled innocence ; but he was very willing to " kill two birds with one stone," and he sped the more swiftly onward, as the direction of the Beaver River Agency could be followed without material loss of time in reaching his own ultimate destination. A little more speed was all.

But this veteran wanderer over the prairie was not the man to use up his horse without cause ; and when the swinging gallop had continued for several hours, and it was not far from midnight, he drew rein in a deep valley, through which a small stream wandered.

" Hyar we'll stop till daylight," exclaimed the trapper. " Old Burt ain't the man to use his hoss up, unless somebody's life is worth more nor him, and I hain't see'd that critter yit."

" Don' you t'ink I's wuf all de hosses in dis country ?" asked Pomp.

" Yer might be to put in a show, but fur nuthin' else "

CHAPTER II.

ON TOWARD THE NORTH-WEST.

OLD Burt Bunker was at home on the prairie. For thirty years, as we have said, he had wandered back and forth over the mountains, setting his traps by the streams which have their rise in the Rocky Mountains, braving death from the dozen different tribes through whose territory he was compelled to pass, and literally carrying his life in his hand, in the shape of his trusty rifle.

His hardened frame was scarred by many a bullet that had plowed its way through flesh and muscle, and his grizzled beard scarcely concealed the slashes and wounds that crossed his face in every direction. He had met the Indians in the hand-to-hand encounter, in the lonely forest; he had plunged through driving snow and sleet, thankful for the midnight darkness that made his escape so easy.

Such, in brief, was the life-history of old Burt Bunker; and on the day when we introduce him to the reader, he is a man close on to half a century in age, and his face is set toward the head-waters of the Yellowstone, and he is going on his annual expedition to these far-off trapping-grounds, where he expects to spend the winter, and when laden with furs and peltries in the spring, with perhaps an extra horse picked up in the wilds, he will start for St. Louis again.

It was in the year 1843, and the great North-west was known scarcely any more at that day than it was forty years before. Fremont had accomplished nothing in the way of enlightening the world as to the character of that great western half of our continent, which of late has made such prodigious strides in advancement and wealth.

Therefore, Burt was little disturbed by the tide of emigration rolling westward. As he rode along on Honeycomb, that had been his companion for half a dozen years, he occasionally caught sight of a settler's cabin that he did not remember ever having seen before, and here and there he saw

the smoke of the emigrant-train ascending from some clump of trees.

He made it a principle to avoid all these unpleasant sights as much as was in his power. If the ascending column of smoke was in front of his horse's nose, he turned aside, and made a wide *détour*, so as to escape meeting the strangers. If perchance he encountered some of these pioneers, he scowled savagely at them, gruffly answered their salutations, and passed on. They weren't going to inveigle him into any conversation ; that wasn't his business in this part of the world.

"They hain't got no right here, noways," he occasionally muttered, after he had given some presumptuous stranger the go-by ; "this part the world war made fur hunters and trappers, and such gentlemen. I s'pose the reds b'long hyar too," he added, after a little longer reflection upon it, "'cause ef they didn't I don't s'pose they'd be hyar ; but then, why don't they behave themselves ? That's what gits my time."

This was the question which the rude philosopher could not decide for himself ; and so, when he reached this after-phase, he was generally sensible enough to give it up and stop thinking about it.

Where the old trapper originally came from was unknown ; but it was certain, to those who took the trouble to think about him, that it was not from St. Louis, where he always made his home. He was very reticent about his early history, and the suavity of no one, as yet, had been sufficient to penetrate the shell of reserve in which he incased himself.

He had repulsed several attempts to "pump" him, with such savage fierceness, that no one attempted it a second time, and so, by the time he reached middle life, he was annoyed very little in that way.

It was known years before that he had had companions with him on his extended explorations of the West ; but they had all disappeared. Some had died in the natural course of events, and others had met with violent deaths at the hands of the treacherous red-skins, who would rather hunt a white man than any other game that their country afforded.

There were some who said he had once a wife who had died long years before, and had left a child behind, and he had died also, in his youth, so that, if such were really the

case, there was a partial explanation of his disinclination to the society of his kind, and his love for the wild, adventurous career to which he had devoted himself so long.

It was with a mental protest that he consented to the temporary society of the negro Pomp on the present occasion ; but, with all the trapper's oddities he was kind at heart, and when he refused to consort with those of his kind whom he encountered in the West, it was when he was certain they were just as well off without him as with him—so that no harm was done to any one by his course.

Burt Bunker generally kindled a fire at night when he made his halt, but he did not do so upon the present occasion, as he had no use for it, and the story that the negro had told convinced him of the danger there was to apprehend from the Blackfeet, who rarely ventured so far south of the agency.

The two horses were turned loose, the trapper feeling no uneasiness about his animal straying off, while Pomp pretended to feel the same about his, although he had more cause to suspect his wandering away upon the first opportunity. So they merely wrapped their blankets around them and lay down upon the earth.

"Golly ! s'pose de Injins come!" gasped the negro, from beneath the folds of his blanket.

"Let 'em come ; Honeycomb will give us notice—"

"Who is he?" asked Pomp, in amazement.

"Go to sleep, and I'll tell yer in the mornin'."

Old Burt was about lying down, when he felt something cold upon his hand, and looking quickly, saw that it had been struck by a snow-flake. The air was full of snow that was sifting silently downward, and by morning the prairie might be covered to the depth of several inches.

"This yer's bad fur Olive Mulford!" muttered the trapper, as he drew his blanket over his face. "This will cover up the trail of them varmints, and thar'll be no follerin' 'em arter this night. Howsomever, I'll take a sleep on it."

And with this philosophical conclusion, he turned on his side, and speedily sunk into a deep, dreamless slumber.

The night passed away without any alarm ; and, as he expected, when he opened his eyes, he found the prairie shrouded

in snow while it was still drifting downward, with the same gossamer softness.

The trapper shook the snow from his blanket, as the lion flirts the dew from his mane, and then roused the negro, who was still slumbering heavily. The fellow was greatly frightened when he found that the storm had caught them.

"Come, hunt up that hoss of yourn," said Burt, "fur we don't git any breakfast till we reach Beaver River Agency."

"Golly! I feels kinder faint already."

But, although the hunter quickly vaulted upon the back of his animal, there was nothing to be seen of the other one. Pomp stared around in amazement, and then exclaimed:

"I bet your hoss eat mine up."

"Mebbe he did," was the reply of the imperturbable hunter; "look 'round and see whether you can find any bones."

The negro did as advised, but, of course, with little encouragement. The snow was falling quite fast, and look in whatever direction they chose, nothing was to be seen of the missing horse.

He had evidently wandered away, and there was no means of recapturing him.

Pomp was in a dilemma.

"Golly! I'll hab to walk!" he exclaimed.

"Jump aboard; it won't hurt Honeycomb to carry you a few miles."

Pomp was only too glad to accept the invitation of the trapper, and he lost no time in mounting his animal behind him. The powerful beast seemed scarcely to feel the additional weight, and at a word from his master, struck into a sweeping gallop toward Beaver River Agency.

It was snowing harder than ever, and the wind was directly in their faces. The eddying flakes were whirled about their ears, and spun through the air with a swiftness that soon incased their bodies from head to foot, old Burt receiving the largest part by virtue of his more exposed situation.

Now and then, when Pomp ventured to peep over the shoulder of the burly trapper, he was met with such a rush of skurrying snow-flakes, as to be blinded, and he found it impossible to see a rod in any direction. The wind was blowing strong, and the huge spats of snow seemed to pass hori-

zontally, and even upward in the air, tossed and blown hither and thither, until the atmosphere was able to hold no more, and they fell to the ground from the pressure above them.

"Hebens o' na'th!" exclaimed the darky, as he shrunk up behind the hunter, "it'll neber snow ag'in, fur dere won' be any snow left, when dis gits frough."

Burt Bunker paid no heed to the lamentations of his sable companion. His face was set like a flint toward Beaver River Agency, and he was not to be deviated or turned from his course by any such flurry of the elements as this. Great as was his knowledge of the wilds through which they were journeying, he was compelled to use his eyes to the utmost to prevent himself going astray; for, it was more difficult to proceed in such a tempest in the daytime, than it was in the still and dark night.

But assisted by the sagacious Honeycomb, who appeared to comprehend his wishes, they kept straight onward, the animal keeping up a rapid walk, and in the course of the forenoon reined up in front of Beaver River Agency.

This consisted of a single building, large and strongly built, and guarded by a garrison of a score of men, all of whom being accustomed to a frontier life, were abundantly able to hold their own against any combination of Indians. They had been attacked times without number; but the architect who planned this Government building, made it also impregnable, and it was never in serious danger.

To this building, under a strong military escort, the Government sent annually the supplies for the Indians, and Colonel Mulford was the authorized agent for proportioning and distributing them; and in the fort, at this time, were stored ammunition, whisky, hatchets, blankets, beads, trinkets, tobacco, and the thousand and one articles in demand among the red-skins, and all under the charge of the colonel and his men.

The trapper saw no living person, as he paused with his horse's nose almost touching the gate of the stockade that surrounded the building; but, he had scarcely halted, when he was hailed and his business demanded. His answer was such as to convince the garrison that he was a friend, and the gate was thrown open and he was admitted.

"Whar's Colonel Mulford?" was the first question.

"He isn't here," replied a man, with the shoulder-straps of a captain of the regular army.

"I didn't ask where he *warn't*," roared the irate trapper.
"I asked whar he *war*."

The eyes of the officer twinkled, as he replied.

"I can't tell you exactly where Colonel Mulford is. He started for Washington yesterday morning—"

"Why didn't he come home fust?" interrupted Pomp, who couldn't understand why he should not have called and bidden his family good-by.

"He was sent for in urgent haste; the dispatches were so delayed in reaching him, that he found he had not a minute to spare, if he was to reach Washington in time. So he mounted the fleetest horse at the fort, took a couple of men, and darted for Washington like a streak of lightning. I don't think there is much chance of overhauling him between here and that city."

"Didn't he luff any word fur us?" asked Pomp.

"Yes; I was to ride out there to-day or to-morrow, and carry a message to his daughter—"

"Golly! no use in dat!" added the darky, wlth a shake of his head.

"What's the matter?"

"Miss Olive and me muddder ain't no more."

"What!" demanded the officer. "Dead?"

"Golly, no; I mean dat dey ain't home any more. De house am burnt down, and de Injins hab run off wid 'em bofe, and nobody can't tell whar dey hain't gone to."

"What does this mean?" asked the captain, turning toward the trapper.

The latter explained what is already known to the reader and as may be supposed, the captain was astonished.

"Good heavens! what can be done?" he exclaimed, in great excitement. "I warned Colonel Mulford a dozen times about leaving his daughter there; but, what can we do?"

An exchange of news followed, in which Burt gave it as his opinion, that nothing at all could be accomplished, unless some friendly Indian could be engaged to take the matter in hand.

"The trail has been kivered by the snow," he added, "and so thar ain't nuthin' to be gained thar. You'd better take an Injin to hunt up the gal; do you know of any such critter?"

The captain was silent awhile, as if in deep thought, and then he replied :

"There is one they call the Antelope, that has done us a good turn or two; but no one can tell where he is, or where to look for him."

"He's yer man," said the trapper, and feeling that he had done all that was possible under the circumstances, he invited himself to partake of dinner, after which he mounted his horse and left the fort. He was strongly urged to stay and take part in the rescue of the captive; but he would not consent, declaring that he had left St. Louis behind time, and had got more and more so on his way thither, until it was impossible to "catch up."

Once more on the back of his powerful Honeycomb, the trapper turned his face again toward the north-west, and rode along at an easy gallop. The snow had ceased falling, and he noticed as he advanced that it grew lighter, until finally he reached clear open prairie again. The storm had been confined to a comparatively small section of the country, and it had been his fortune to be caught in the very center of it.

But the air was sharp and bracing, and presaged the near approach of winter, and his proximity to the mountains. He wrapped the huge fur coat more closely around him, and occasionally relieved his horse, and warmed his own blood by running a mile or two beside him.

The nipping keenness in the air seemed to give him pleasurable sensations, and his bronzed features now and then relaxed into a smile, and he muttered to himself in his own peculiar way.

As the shade of night began settling over the prairie, the trapper looked about him for some suitable camping-place, and was fortunate enough to discover a small grove of timber a short distance to the right. He headed toward and had nearly reached it, when he espied an antelope coming full speed toward him.

"That's lucky," he exclaimed, as he grasped his rifle, "if he will only keep on in that direction."

The graceful animal bounded swiftly on, until within a hundred yards, when it caught sight of the horseman for the first time. Instantly it wheeled to run, when Burt pulled the trigger, and leaping a few steps, it dropped dead in its tracks.

The next minute the trapper was on the ground beside it. He was already leaning over to plunge his knife into its body, when he started back with the exclamation :

" Reds ag'in, or I'll be skulped !"

That which caught his sight, and caused this cry, was the sight of another bullet-hole in the neck of the antelope, from which the life-blood was also flowing.

CHAPTER III.

THE CAMP IN THE TIMBER.

As old Burt, the trapper, stood beside the dead antelope, with knife in hand, and witnessed this proof that some one else was not far away, he thrust back his knife into his belt, and caught his rifle, which he had reloaded while hastening toward his prey.

The gloom of night was already settling over the prairie, and he glanced with some apprehension at the grove in which he had decided to camp for the night; for he was near enough to be brought down by a well-aimed rifle, and there was no telling but that a whole horde of Blackfeet were swarming in the gloom among the trees.

He turned toward his horse, whose keenness of scent was an infallible guide at such times. One glance was enough to show that he had detected something suspicious. His head was raised, his nose pointed toward the timber, while he snuffed the air and gave utterance to a faint whinny.

" What is it, Honeycomb ?" he asked.

At the same instant Burt looked toward the wood, and saw the figure of a man walking toward him. If only a single person, he cared not whether he was white or red, and he stood by his horse and calmly awaited his approach.

As soon as he could gain a distinct view of the stranger, he saw that he was a white man in the garb of a hunter, with a rifle slung over his shoulder ; and Burt was no more pleased than if it had been a wild Indian on the war-path ; for he disliked one as much as the other, when in the solitude of the great wilderness.

The young man walked unhesitatingly forward until he was directly before the trapper, when he extended his hand, with the pleasant salutation :

"Good-evening, sir."

Burt could not refuse the proffered politeness, although he replied rather gruffly :

"Good-evenin'."

"I hardly expected to meet you here," continued the other, in the same gentlemanly manner.

"And I didn't expect to see *you* hyar ; whar did you come from ?"

"I am on my way to the Beaver River Agency—"

"Did you come alone ? Whar's yer animile ?" interrupted the trapper, in considerable astonishment.

"Hold on," replied the other. "I joined an emigrant or exploring train that was going to make the attempt to reach Oregon. I kept with them until this morning, when we were within a short distance of the fort, and I concluded to indulge in the luxury of a hunt. I reached the grove there this afternoon, dismounted, and finally caught sight of the antelope, which I managed to get a shot at, only to have it turn and rush to you, doubtless knowing that you were a much more skilled hunter than I."

A suspicion was in the mind of the trapper.

"What mought ye be goin' to the Beaver River Agency fur ?"

"I am going there to see Colonel Mulford, and then intend to spend a few days at his house in the society of his daughter."

"I see ; be you and the gal engaged to be married ?"

It was evident that the stranger was somewhat touched at the sharp questioning of the hunter ; but he kept down his feelings and answered, laughingly :

"**You are asking a question, my friend, that you are hardly**

authorized to do ; I can say, however, that we are *not* engaged."

" But, yer expect to see her, don't yer ?"

" I do ; that is my principal object in coming to this section."

" I'm sorry fur yer," said the trapper, with genuine pity " Colonel Mulford is on his way to Washington, and yesterday a party of Injins come tearin' down on that gal, and took her and the wench away."

" What !" exclaimed the young man, leaping back.

Burt Bunker went over the story again, and the stranger listened like one enchain'd and fascinated. Then followed rapid questions, uttered in great excitement, and finally his feelings were calmed somewhat, and they talked calmly and rationally.

" What's yer handle ?" demanded the trapper, in his abrupt manner.

" Eugene Mentrose."

" Eugene, eh ? I like that name, because— wal, never mind," he hastily added, as he managed to choke down his emotion ; " thar's only one thing yer can do."

" What's that ? Go to the fort and get a party of rescue ?" The trapper shook his head.

" No ; the trail has been snowed under and lost, so that none of 'em can't find it nor do nothin'."

" What is it, then ?"

" Thar's a friendly Injin somewhar about. Ef yer can only find him and put him on the track, he'll do more nor a dozen whites."

" What is his name ?"

" He's called the Antelope."

" I know him !" exclaimed Mentrose.

" Whar did yer ever see him ?"

" He came from Independence with us, and we parted company only this morning ; we struck up quite a friendship. We have had many a hunt together, and I am satisfied he would do any thing in his power for me."

" Whar did he go ?"

" I can not tell. He simply rode away on his horse, after saying good-by, and that was the last of him."

" You'd better mount yer animile, ride on to Beaver River Agency, and thar yer can git some one to put yer on the track of this Antelope. He's the red-skin to help yer, and yer can't do nothin' without him."

Mentrose stood a few minutes in silence, and then looked up.

" I'll take your advice. I know the direction to this Indian Agency, but do you think I can reach it to-night?"

" No ; you'd better wait till mornin', and then take a clean start, and yer can make it afore noon. The night is goin' to be dark, and you'll be likely to go astray."

Old Burt disliked very much the idea of having a companion any longer than was positively necessary ; but he felt guilty at the thought of turning away this young man whom he had encountered in such an unexpected manner. He debated a moment, and then said :

" It's late, and I ain't goin' no furder than the grove yonder, and ef yer a mind, yer can stay with me till mornin'."

" I will be glad to do so," said Mentrose, quite pleased at the invitation, " for it's lonely enough in this country without refusing the companionship of a man when you can get him."

" That looks like a prime antelope," said the trapper, glancing at the outstretched animal in the darkness, " and we'll make a supper of him. I say, Mint Rose, do you smoke?"

" Sometimes," replied the young man, as he produced a cigar and offered it to the hunter.

" Ugh ! git out ! I never could stand any of that city stuff ; I use the pipe, and will wait till I've throwed myself outside my supper. Woof ! I've got a holler under my coat that I could chuck an ox in."

The trapper caught up the antelope, slung it over his shoulder, and walked toward the grove, Mentrose keeping by his side, while Burt's horse followed his master as obediently as if he were a dog.

The night was sharp and clear, and, as they entered the small belt of timber, the gloom around them was so great, that they could scarcely distinguish the trees ; but the trapper walked forward like a man in his own garden.

Near the middle of the grove was found a hollow-like

depression, in which the trapper made his preparations for kindling a fire. In the space of a few minutes he had a big, bright blaze roaring and crackling, and sending a genial warmth all around.

"Whar's yer animile?" asked Burt, turning toward Mentrose.

"A short distance away—fastened to a tree."

"Take mine out to him and interduce him, so that they can git acquainted, fur ef yer keep 'em apart, may nimile will be oneeasy all night, and will be apt to think thar ar' varmints 'round, when thar ain't."

Seeing that the hunter was earnest in his request, Mentrose conducted his horse to where his own was cropping the grass. The brutes snuffed, and were a little suspicious of each other at first, but they speedily got on good terms, and so he left them.

When he returned to the fire, the trapper was busy, broiling several huge slices from the antelope, and the smell of the meat made a most fragrant odor through the grove.

"I say, Mint Rose," said old Burt, turning his shaggy face full upon the young man, "yer didn't see no sign, did yer?"

"None at all."

"Jes' go out on the perairie, some ways, and walk 'round the timber, and obsarve whether yer can see much of this candle, 'cause we're in the Blackfoot country, and we must be keerful."

This was rather a cool request on the part of the trapper, in the words in which he uttered it; but Mentrose saw that he was no more than prudent, and he unhesitatingly obeyed.

It took some time for him to perform the duty required of him, as he walked out over a hundred yards upon the prairie and then moved around the grove. This caused him to describe a very large circle, and he proceeded slowly, so as to do it thoroughly.

The night was dark, and without any moon—but the November stars twinkled brightly in the vault overhead, and a keen eye could make out objects to some distance upon the prairie. A cold wind was now and then gently blowing, and the listening ear of Mentrose caught its mournful sighing, as it moaned through the trees that inclosed their camp-fire.

As he walked around the grove, he looked right and left—out upon the prairie and toward the timber—each time searching for something he had no wish to see.

He was partially gratified. In the first direction, as far as the eye could extend, nothing was visible but the blank, impenetrable darkness. No distant, glimmering camp-fire, the shouts of no careering horsemen, nor the sound of their animals' hoofs, caught eye or ear. There was no sign of their foes at all.

Circling around the grove in the manner described, he found that their own camp-fire was almost invisible; but, once or twice, he caught its starlike glimmer between the trees and through the undergrowth—beacon-light enough to guide the prowling savage who might be searching for his prey.

When the circuit was completed, our hero made his way back to his friend again, who had just finished the cooking of two huge slices from the choicest portion of the antelope.

"Thar!" said he, as he handed one of them to his companion, "I reckon from the looks of yer mouth, Mint Rose, that yer know how to chaw, 'cause if yer don't you've no business in this part of creation."

"I'll soon show you," replied the young man, who, with a sharp hunting-knife and appetite, began eating the meat. It was nicely cooked, crisp and juicy, and both men ate until they desired no more.

Not until they had finished did the trapper ask:

"Didn't yer see nothin' out on the perairie?"

"Nothing of Indians; but I caught once or twice the twinkle of the camp-fire."

"In course; I knowed yer would. I only sent yer out to give yer a little walk and appetite afore supper; but I've let the fire go down—so thar ain't any likelihood of its being seen by the varmints."

The fire had been allowed to sink down to a mass of glowing embers, which, with their blankets around them, made them as comfortable as they could wish.

The trapper had filled his short clay pipe, while Mentrose was puffing at a cigar, so that, considering their circumstances, they were as cheerful as possible. The young man was oppressed by the astounding news he had received regarding

Olive Mulford, but still he had strong hopes that she would be speedily recovered, and that the wooing, which he had begun under such favorable circumstances, might be concluded.

As the two reclined upon the ground, the younger remarked, inquiringly :

" This looks like an old camping-ground, Burt ; I see boxes here and there, and there are black, dead embers scattered around, as if made by a fire that had been kindled and that had died a long time ago."

" Yas," replied the trapper, as he emitted a heavy volume of smoke. " Fifteen years ago this fall, I made my first camp hyar, and I haven't missed a year since."

" Is it possible ?" exclaimed Mentreose, in astonishment. " Have you always been alone ?"

" Not 'zactly," replied Bunker, with an odd smile. " Thar have been three of my men wiped out 'round this camp-fire, and all three of 'em sot right squar' whar you're sittin' now."

" What !" exclaimed the young man, springing up as if he felt the twinge of the Blackfeet's bullet. " All killed at once ?"

The trapper laughed heartily at the alarm of his companion, and motioned him to take his seat again.

" The fust man killed war Black Dick, and it war fifteen years ago, the fust time I'd ever struck my flint in this timber. Me and Dick war younger then than now, and had hunted together for years. He sot right thar, whar you be, talkin' and laughin' and smokin', when he stopped all at once and went over backward. I had heard somethin' whiz, and as I looked up, I see'd the feather of an arrer stickin' out his breast while the head was on t'other side of him, and I knowed th varmints war on us. I didn't stop to git my hoss, but mad a jump fur the trees, and done some tall walkin' afore I got out of that hornet's nest. I had to go it alone that winter, but I managed to catch an Injin pony, and I took quite a lot of peltries into St. Louis in the spring.

" It wa'n't till three years arter that I got cotched in another muss, and that war so much like the fust, that it ain't hardly wuth tellin'. The only difference war that it war in the winter time, and the snow war two feet deep on the perairie.

Jim Johnson war pinged by a dozen bullets, and I got a couple in my hide, but I got off with 'em."

The hunter paused, as if lost in reverie, and after a few minutes, Mentreose said :

"I haven't heard the third instance."

"See hyar," exclaimed the trapper, fiercely, while the tears glistened beneath his shaggy eyebrows, "don't yer ever ax me that ag'in, 'cause I can't stand it—mebbe I'll hurt yer ef yer furgit."

Mentreose apologized for the unpleasant reminiscences he had unwittingly caused. He saw that the third death had "hit" the old trapper in some way that he could not understand.

Burt Bunker sat silent for some time, and then, looking toward his companion, quietly remarked in a low tone :

"*Set still ; thar's an Injin within a dozen feet of yer !*"

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRAIRIE CAPTIVES.

OLIVE MULFORD was a beautiful woman, some twenty years of age, when her father, Colonel Mulford, was appointed Indian agent, with his head-quarters at the fort on Beaver River.

Being a widower, with but this single child, he loved her with all the fervent affection of a kind father, and there was nothing in his power that he could do for her welfare, that was not done. He had been a prominent officer in the Florida war, and stood high with his Government, who gave him this position at his request, until he could recover from several wounds, that had caused him considerable trouble for several years.

Besides this, Olive showed a predisposition to consumption—the same fell disease that had carried away her mother—and knowing how beneficial the air of the Far West was to weak

lungs, his main object, after all, in going westward, was for the benefit of his daughter.

After reaching the Beaver River Agency, he kept her, and her two servants—Pomp and his mother—at the fort until the mild weather set in, when he removed them to a cabin, which he had had built in a romantic grove, by a spring possessing remarkable medicinal powers. Here he intended she should remain until cold weather set in.

Colonel Mulford was warned of the danger incurred by this course, and he was too experienced a soldier not to comprehend the situation fully ; he admitted that there was danger in placing such a distance between himself and daughter, but he believed it was not of such a serious character as to cause alarm.

The few months that he had occupied the office of Indian agent, had been sufficient to make himself well acquainted with the tribes with whom he was brought officially in contact, and to win the golden opinions of the dusky dogs with whom he had dealings. They saw in him a fearless, honest, upright man, who desired their good as well as his own.

With the genuine warriors of the different tribes he was soon friends, so that he concluded there was nothing to fear from *them*. The real danger was from the straggling, lawless members of the Blackfoot and other tribes, whose incursions, however, were so rare as to cause him little apprehension.

Olive derived such immediate and great benefit from the waters, and the rose-tint of health flushed her cheek so rapidly, that he saw her health would be completely restored by a few months' residence in this wild section. Scarcely a day passed, that the colonel, with one or two of his men, did not ride out to the cabin and spend several hours there, frequently remaining all night.

The building was so constructed that it could stand quite a siege from a foe—long enough certainly for assistance to reach it from the fort ; for, on a still night, the reports of guns could be heard the entire distance, and it was hardly possible for twenty-four hours to pass without communication of some kind taking place between the cabin and the agency—a siege which the three inmates could stand without any difficulty at any time.

All this being taken into consideration by Colonel Mulford, he concluded to run the risk, especially as his daughter urged him to it, and expressed no fear at all. She and her servants were furnished with a fleet horse apiece, so that, if their foes should appear in the daytime, they believed they had little cause for fear.

We have referred, in the first chapter, to the sad mistake committed. Olive Mulford had been taking a ride over the prairie, and was drawing near home, when she succeeded in shooting a small antelope, upon which she concluded to make a supper. Wishing to do it in the true hunter style, she halted near a small piece of woods, and set Pomp at work, gathering fuel for a fire.

The negro had scarcely disappeared, when a party of Blackfeet swooped down upon them like the whirlwind, seized her and Polly, placed each on her horse, and was off again like a shot.

The course of action adopted by the astonished Pomp has already been made known to the reader.

Olive had become quite expert in the use of a rifle, and had she been given the opportunity, she would have convinced these lawless red-skins of the fact; but no such occasion came to her, and, ere she was aware, she was as helpless as an infant in the hands of the Blackfeet.

Polly Brown, her servant, was furious. She was a bony, muscular negress, as black as ebony, and with a temper that was a tempest when aroused. Colonel Mulford had furnished her with a gun, also; but, unfortunately, she had left it home—so that she, too, was powerless to accomplish any thing against her captors.

"Oh, massy!" she growled, between her clenched teeth, "*wouldn't I like to wring de neck ob dat red nigger a-settin' on his hoss dar. Ugh, you beast!*"

Polly and Olive were allowed to ride side by side, while the Indians were all around them. The unconscious object of her wrath was a huge, brawny fellow that had lifted her from the ground and slung her rather roughly upon her animal. He was riding at a moderate gait, a short distance ahead, and talking in his own tongue with one or two of his comrades.

"Jes' see de nasty warmint grin!" she exclaimed, spitefully. "I'd like to break a hoe-handle ober his head, an' put de hoe in his big mouf."

"'Sh!" interposed Olive, who was just beginning to realize the peril of her position; "they may hear you."

"Do you s'pose I keer if dey do?" demanded Polly. "I'd like to see one ob 'em lay de weight ob his hand on me or you."

"What could *you* do?"

"Me? I'd scratch his eyes out!" replied the lady of color, looking very much, just then, as if she could carry out her threat.

"I am afraid it will go ill with you, unless you curb your temper. These Blackfeet are bad Indians."

"So dey are—one is jes' as bad as de oder."

"What will father do when he learns this?" sighed Olive. "He must soon learn about it. He hasn't been to see us to-day, and will surely come over to-night."

"He'll shoot ebery one ob de red niggers—jes' as sure as you're born!" was the emphatic response of her servant.

It was growing dark at the time of the capture, so that our heroine was not without hope of a speedy pursuit and rescue. She little dreamed that at that moment her father, mounted on his fleetest horse, was speeding eastward as fast as his animal could carry him, and with no thought of the fearful peril in which she was placed. Had she known this, her heart would have sunk with despair.

They had gone but a mile or so, when they noticed that two of the Indians turned to the right, and galloped away at a speed which quickly carried them out of sight in the darkness. They had no suspicion that their errand was to burn the building that had afforded them such pleasant shelter and repose for so many weeks; but such was the case, and it was not long before their solitary house was wrapped in flames, and burned to the very ground.

The Blackfoot party numbered eight, and they were as villainous a set of dogs as ever sat a horse, painted, bedaubed, and bedizened in the most grotesque manner, and were well-calculated to terrify any person not accustomed to seeing such specimens of the human race.

Olive judged them to be Blackfeet from their dress and general appearance, and while she knew that, as a tribe, they were friendly disposed toward her father and herself, yet she had heard enough at the fort to understand that they numbered some of the most desperate and lawless characters to be found among all the tribes of the North-west; so that she had every reason to pray for a speedy rescue from their power.

The Indians pursued an easterly course for some time after dark, when they made a sharp turn toward the left, deviating shortly still more in that direction, so that the route became toward the north-west—a course which led toward the principal hunting-grounds of the Blackfeet. Once within this country, they would be invulnerable against any force that the United States Government could bring against them. In fact, with the facilities at their command, it may be said that they were so from the first. The only means possible by which a party of wild Indians could be overcome, was to employ a pursuing force as well mounted as they, and one whose members understood their peculiar method of fighting.

As the night waned, the darkness increased until the captives could scarcely discern their captors. Both of the former were without blankets, but one of the savages threw his over the shoulders of Olive, and another did the same for her sable companion.

"Gracious alive!" exclaimed the latter, not a little surprised at the unexpected kindness of the Blackfeet; "I t'ink dem red niggers must be gittin' sick."

"Don't show such ingratitude for their goodness," said Olive, in a reproving tone; "they may not be so bad as we imagine, after all."

"Hebens! dey can't be no *wuss* dan I b'l'eve 'em are," was the truthful retort of Polly; "ob all de wicked folks dat eber libed, I t'ink dey is de wust. Hello! what dat?"

"What was it like?"

"Sumfin' hit me on de cheek; dar it is ag'in!"

"I felt it too—"

"Dar it is ag'in—heigho! what's de matter?"

"*It is snowing!*" exclaimed Olive; "look upward and you will feel the flakes fast enough."

So it proved; the same snow-storm that caught Burt Bunker

and Pomp had now begun, and the feathery flakes were coming faster and faster. With the increase of the particles in the air, the darkness deepened until our friends were unable to distinguish each other, even when riding as closely as was possible.

But they knew they were environed by savages, whose guttural words were ever audible, and the sound of whose horses' feet were heard upon the soft prairie.

By and by the thought came to Olive Mulford that this darkness might be the means of her escape. All she wanted was a fair start, and she was certain her horse could hold his own against the best one in the possession of her captors.

And she saw no reason why she should not gain the necessary start. A sudden wheel, a sharp word, and he would be off like the wind.

But what of Polly?

She could not desert her, when the very act of doing so would most probably bring down their fury upon her guiltless head.

She had heard no word of English spoken by her captors, but, for all that, she suspected that some of them knew something of the language, and if they chose, could make their own meaning known in it.

Such being the case, she ran great risk of making her project known to them when she should communicate it to Polly, as she had determined to do from the first.

Still, the whole proceeding was fraught with risk, and she did not intend to hesitate upon that account.

"Polly," she called, in a tone that she believed could reach no other ears.

"I's a-listenin'," she replied, in a somewhat louder key.

"'Sh! not so loud—"

"Do you s'pose I keer ef de nasty critters do hear me?" continued the servant, elevating her voice with each word.
"I don't keer ef dey do—"

"But *I* care," was the stern response of Olive."

"Wal, dat makes a difference ob de sarcumstances ob de transaction," replied the negress, in a lower, meek tone.

"Listen carefully; for I wish no one to hear me but *you*."

The servant leaned her head as far toward her mistress as she could, and gave her to understand, by a sort of aspiration, that her wishes were respected.

"I am going to try and get away from these Indians."

"Yas."

"And I want you to go with me."

"So does I."

"Now, listen again: in a few moments I am going to turn my horse's head about and start him off on a run. The instant I do so, you must follow. Do you understand me?"

"I bet I does, and I'll foller mighty quick."

"Very well; when you hear me speak to my animal, that means that the time has come, and if you wait a second it will be too late."

"All right," was the confident response of Polly.

Olive Mulford's heart trembled at the thought of the attempt she was about to make. She spent several moments in earnest prayer for success, and then gave her horse a quick jerk, uttered a sharp word, and wheeled his head about.

The obedient animal showed almost human intelligence in his quickness of perception of the wishes of his rider. He whirled on his hind feet, and made a furious plunge straight outward, knocking several animals from his path, and away he sped over the prairie.

"Come on, Polly!" shouted the girl, as she sped swiftly onward, with her heart beating high with the sudden hope thus raised in her breast.

There was no response from her faithful friend, but she heard the tramp of pursuing horsemen, and the shouts of the infuriated Blackfeet, who were tearing through the blinding snow in their mad pursuit.

Hope fluttered in her breast for a while, as the fearful sounds seemed so close, but she had not gone far when her heart lightened, as she became certain that her enemies were gradually falling behind.

"Go it, good Dick!" she exclaimed, as she patted the animal's neck; "the broad prairies hold not your equal."

On, on she sped, even after all sounds of pursuit had died out, with undiminished speed, until finally she reined up her panting beast and listened.

All was still save the soft rustle of the snow upon her garments. No sound of the running horses' feet, or shrill whoop of the Indian, reached her ears. All was still; she was free

But where was Polly? Had she followed her? Or had she been frustrated in the attempt, and was she still in the hands of the Indians?

These were the questions that our heroine asked herself, and which she was unable to answer satisfactorily.

She felt that she could not desert her friend, who was so ready to risk her life for her sake. Polly would have perished rather than have acted in such a manner toward her, and in one sense the girl would have looked upon herself as the cause of the death of the poor creature.

All was darkness around her, and she had only a general idea of what part of the country she was in. She could only guess at the course for her to take, and choosing that which she believed to be the right one, she turned her horse's head about, and allowed him to walk slowly forward.

Hark! She heard some one cough. It sounded like Polly. She listened; yes, she heard the tread of some animal in the snow; surely it was her. The sound came nearer. She called her name, at first low and cautiously, and then louder.

Yes; it *must* be her.

"Polly, why don't you answer me?"

"Ugh! glad to meet pale-face!" exclaimed the gruff voice of a Blackfoot warrior, as he seized the bridle of her horse in his iron grasp.

CHAPTER V.

THE BLACKFOOT ANTELOPE.

A COLD chill crept over Eugene Mentreose, as he heard the trapper announce that an Indian was standing so near him. Coming on the heel of his statement that he had had three companions shot dead in the same spot, it would have taken a man of more than ordinary nerve to sit quiet.

"Don't stir," added Bunker, a moment later; "it's a friendly Injin, and ef I ain't powerful mistook, though I never see'd the critter, I think it's the varmint they call Antelope."

Mentrose could stand it no longer. Springing to his feet, he turned his head, and, by the light of the camp-fire, saw the dim outlines of an Indian standing stationary beside a tree, and apparently looking with great interest at the two men.

His image was so indistinct that he could not make sure of his identity, but he ran the risk.

"Hello, Antelope, why don't you come forward?"

But the Indian never stirred or spoke.

Mentrose called him again—but the tree-trunk beside which he was standing was not more motionless than he.

A shiver of apprehension ran over our hero, and he whispered to the trapper:

"That isn't Antelope; it's some infernal dog that is seeking our lives."

"Be careful he don't drive his tomahawk into your head-piece!"

"If he doesn't answer I'll fire—"

While speaking to Burt, Mentrose had stood with his side toward the red-skin—a most unhunter-like proceeding, as it gave the savage all the opportunity he could wish to drive his tomahawk into his brain, and while standing thus, he observed a peculiar expression on the face of the trapper, which he failed to comprehend.

But, when he turned back again, there stood the Indian within arm's length of him, a position to which he had glided with the silence of a shadow. One glance, however, showed that it was his old friend Antelope, whose rather handsome face was certainly illumined with a smile.

"Confound you, how are you?" exclaimed Mentrose, as he seized his dusky palm. "I've heard that you sometimes joked, and now I know it. Why didn't you answer me?"

The Antelope stepped into the circle of firelight, and looked curiously at the trapper, who understood the meaning of his action. Rising to his feet, the hunter stepped forward, and spoke in his most genial manner:

"Mint Rose, you haven't learned all that is in Injin natur'

yet, else you'd never took yer eyes off that red-skin till yer knowed him. He war waitin' thar till he satisfied himself 'bout me. It wouldn't take an Injin long to see thar war nothin' to be afeard of 'bout *you*."

Taking the hint, Mentreose introduced the gruff old trapper and the light, grayhound-like Blackfoot, who returned his cordial salutation with equal cordiality.

"Burt Bunker great hunter," said he, as the two grasped hands; "kill much Blackfoot."

"Wal, I don't deny it," replied the trapper, as his enormous mouth grew more enormous from its tremendous grin; "I've guv the key-note fur the Blackfoot Death Chant more times than I kin count; but Antelope won't deny that I have allers let 'em alone, when they've sarved me in the same fashion. People in the settlements speak about the rattle-snake, and yet the riptyle never druv his fangs into the chap that didn't 'sturb him, and that's the way with me and the Blackfoot."

"My brother talks true," replied Antelope; "much bad Blackfoot—hurt white men—dey hurt him—all right."

"Yer talk like a man of sense," said Burt; "set down, and we'll give yer a bite of yerself. Antelope eat antelope, hi, yi!"

The Indian was not backward at all in accepting the invitation. He was very hungry, and seated himself upon the ground, while Burt busied himself in cooking a piece of their game.

Mentreose looked on with pleasure, for he was glad to see two such representatives of the contesting races in the West, mingling so fraternally together. Each had heard of the other long before, and their conduct showed a mutual respect such as two brave men, even if enemies, hold toward each other.

While Burt was occupied with his culinary duties, Eugene conversed with the swift-footed Indian, and inquired how it was that they met again, when he had thought their separation was a complete one.

The Antelope explained in his characteristic manner, that he was now upon his own hunting-ground. His village, where his squaw awaited his coming in her lodge, was about

a hundred miles further north-west—a trifling distance to an Indian. He had a singular adventure, which was the cause of his being in this place.

He was riding rapidly over the prairie, during the early part of the forenoon, when he caught sight of a small party of Indians in the distance, whose manner was such that he suspected they had some prisoners or booty with them, and that they were hurrying homeward with it.

The Antelope at once gave chase, and soon came near enough to see that they had two captives with them. The Blackfeet seemed to be averse to receiving any more company, and they continued at such a rapid rate over the prairie, that he gained quite slowly upon them.

But he was gaining surely, and would have overhauled them eventually but for the accident that befell his horse. While going at a tremendous speed, his fore-feet plunged into a deep hole in the prairie, that was hidden by the matted grass, and he fell with such violence as to break his neck on the instant.

His rider shot a dozen feet over his head, but his remarkable agility caused him to light on his feet without injury. Such was the wonderful fleetness of the Antelope, that he meditated continuing the pursuit on foot, confident that he could readily overhaul the party—but their direction indicated that their destination was his own village, so he chose to wait.

Seeing that his horse was dead, he picked up his rifle, and took it afoot. He was thus far on his journey, when he entered the grove to spend the night, having no suspicion of the camp-fire there, until he came directly upon it.

The narrative of the Antelope, as may be supposed, was listened to with the most intense interest by Eugene Mentrose, who did not doubt for an instant that the friendly Indian had seen the Blackfoot party bearing away Olive Mulford and her servant Polly. The trapper had caught the last part of the recital, and he showed no little interest in the matter.

When the Antelope had finished, he exclaimed :

"Thar's yer game! Thar's whar the gal is!"

The friendly Blackfoot was now made acquainted with what was known of the abduction of Olive Mulford, and he at once agreed with the trapper that he had come very near

overtaking the very captives about whom they had been conversing and about whom the young man was so greatly concerned.

By this time the meat was prepared, and the Indian showed his keen appetite by devouring every particle of it with almost the quickness of a wild animal, but he declined more.

It was far into the night, and before lying down, both the trapper and Blackfoot made a circuit of the grove to discover whether there was any danger to be apprehended from their foes.

Nothing of an alarming nature was discovered, and, at a late hour, it was decided safe for all three to lie down, and secure sleep while it was in their power to do so.

The night passed away without the least disturbance of any kind, and at an early hour in the morning, the three hunters were astir and ready for the duties of the day.

There was little ceremony in the separation of the party. After taking their breakfast together, Mentreose and the friendly Indian bade good-day to the trapper, and moved out of the grove.

It had been arranged that they were to take the trail of the party spoken of by Antelope, and follow this with all speed, neither doubting for an instant that they were thus thrown providentially upon the trail of the very ones whom, otherwise, they might have searched for in vain during many days.

Mentreose offered to share his horse with his comrade, or to alternate with him in riding, but he smiled and shook his head.

"Much slow," said the Antelope. "The horse cannot catch the Antelope."

As the red-skin made this boast several times, Mentreose was rather anxious to take the conceit out of him. He was mounted on one of the fleetest and most powerful animals of the West —one that he was certain could, at a moderate gallop, leave him far behind. He said nothing, however, until he saw that the Indian was really bantering him for such a trial.

Mentreose had become so intimate with the Blackfoot, since leaving St. Louis, that he understood him thoroughly, and did not fear to speak his mind freely.

"The Antelope talks as the child," said he; "he is swift of foot, but the horse can leave him far behind."

"Try it," replied the Indian, with an impudent look, peculiar to himself.

They had passed over a small ridge of hills, and were now upon a broad sweep of level prairie. Mentreose hesitated a moment, and then struck his horse into an easy gallop, which the Indian easily equaled.

The rider looked down with no little admiration at the clean-limbed Blackfoot, running at his side with the apparent ease of a grayhound. There seemed to be scarcely any effort at all on the part of the runner, who finally increased his pace so as to slightly draw ahead of the horse.

"There is too much conceit altogether in you," reflected Mentreose, as he witnessed this performance, "and there will be as long as I am so indulgent with you."

He gave his horse a quiet jerk, and he increased his speed fully twenty per cent., so that in a few seconds he was beside the Indian again.

"Come, you had better knock under," called out the horseman; "you will be so exhausted that it will take you half a day to get over it."

The Antelope looked up as if he did not comprehend the meaning of this. Then he suddenly wheeled and ran backward, not only keeping even with the galloping horse, but actually drawing away from him again!

This proceeding somewhat startled Mentreose. If a man could run backward with such velocity, what speed could he not attain when running in the natural manner.

"Doubtless he has practiced that outlandish style," thought the young man, "until he is as good that way as the other, and he has now put it on for effect. He's a conceited red-skin."

The horse was now going at a spanking gait, but nothing like a full run. They had gone the better part of a mile, and the Antelope, with the tantalizing grin upon his face, was looking back at his opponent. Finally he beckoned for him to come on.

Mentreose laughed, and spoke sharply to his horse, determined to end this farce, in short meter.

Faster, faster sped the horse, settling down into the long, easy strides of the animal accustomed to running, and faster and faster sped the Blackfoot, varying his progress by running backward, then forward, then leaping high in air, spinning round and round, whooping and beckoning to his friend to come on.

A mile ahead was another high ridge in the prairie. The Antelope pointed to it, and nodded his head to signify that that was the goal.

"I'll show you!" exclaimed Mentreose, now fully aroused. He gave his horse free rein and urged him to a full run, coming up rapidly to his antagonist and finally passing.

"Sorry to do it," laughed our hero, as he came abreast, "but it is time I took a little wind out of your sail."

On, on he passed, until he was quite a distance ahead of the Blackfoot, who, to all appearance, was putting forth his utmost exertions, in vain.

But ah! Eugene Mentreose had not yet learned all the tricks of the cunning dog, who had permitted himself to fall behind for the purpose of "shutting the eye" of the confident horseman.

A sudden wild whoop, that rung far out, caught the ear of the confident rider, and glancing over his shoulder, he saw the Antelope coming like a meteor. The horse seemed to comprehend the nature of the contest, and to enter thoroughly into its spirit. He plunged ahead at the top of his speed, but, do his utmost, he could not keep the Blackfoot in the rear. The latter already gained upon him, and as steadily passed him, the Indian for the first time calling into play his extraordinary activity and wonderful fleetness.

Mentreose was never so amazed in all his life. He had never even heard of such speed before, and he looked upon the Antelope with a wonder which it would be difficult to express.

The Indian was done trifling. He never abated his tremendous speed in the least, until he sped like an arrow to the top of the ridge, a hundred yards ahead of the horseman, and turning round, beckoned to him to come on.

"I never was so beaten in my life!" exclaimed Mentreose, as he thundered up beside him and drew rein. "I don't

believe there is a horse, or any creature living, that can outrun you. I half suspect that you could run away from a bullet fired after you."

"Dat so," was the complacent reply of the Antelope, who, with all his unequaled attainments, was not particularly overburdened with modesty.

This curious race was witnessed by another party—no less a personage than Burt Bunker, the trapper, who had taken up his journeying again toward the North-west almost immediately after the departure of his friends, and who, reaching a spur or ridge of hills that commanded quite an extensive view of the surrounding country, reined up for a short time and looked off upon the plains.

He watched the two men a few moments, and, although they were a long distance off, it did not take him long to understand what was going on, and he felt no little interest in the result.

"I don't wonder that they've christened that varmint the Antelope, 'cause he's the swiftest critter in the West, and I don't b'lieve thar's nothin' that travels on legs that kin beat him."

He watched the men a few minutes longer, and then, as was his custom, muttered to himself:

"Quar; I wonder ef that Mint Rose ar' the chap he calls himself? Wonder ef he noticed me, when I fust got a good look at him by the fire? Skulp me! but don't they look alike! It beats all natur'! Why didn't I ax him? No, no, no—what a fool I am!"

He turned about, dashed away the tears that were coursing down his bronzed cheeks, and compressing his lips, started on toward the beaver runs of the Yellowstone.

But there were wondrous events close at hand, of which he little dreamed!

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE BLACKFOOT COUNTRY.

THE Blackfoot, called the Antelope, after the astonishing exhibition of his speed that we have mentioned, disdained to take any rest, but resumed his walking, passed on over the ridge, and descended into the level prairie beyond.

Mentrose was now in a section the like of which he had never seen before. There were broad stretches of plain, but none of them reached out to the horizon, as he had been accustomed to see, when journeying further south.

The cloud-like peaks of the mountains looked blue and filmy in the great distance, although he knew their tops were covered with snow. On beyond these lay the Blackfoot village, toward which they were journeying.

This was a very undulating portion of the country, being broken up into prairie, mountain, wood, and stream, and they could not expect to make any thing like the progress they desired; but the Antelope said that two days' rapid traveling, without any accident, would take them to the village, where, undoubtedly, the two captives were held.

The Blackfoot Indians are to-day the most dreaded red-skins of the North-west, as, beyond question, they are the most powerful. Twenty-five years ago, which, it will be remembered, is the time of which we are speaking, there was no tribe that had any claim to being their peer. They roamed over thousands of square miles of territory, dwelt in many different villages, and waged an unrelenting war upon all whites, whether in the shape of hunters, explorers, or trappers, who ventured upon their hunting-grounds.

The fleet-footed Antelope has been termed a friendly Indian—an appellation which must not be understood as implying that he was unfriendly to his own people. He had simply declined to act as an enemy to the whites, and, on several occasions, during the past few years, he had signally befriended them.

He had a wife and several children, who dwelt undisturbed among the Blackfeet, and he invariably made his home there, when not engaged on the scout. It was well known among his people that he was well disposed toward the whites, but no one troubled him on that account. He had an eloquent story of being saved from death by a party of hunters, and of his promise to them that he would never raise his hand against their race, unless it was done in self-defense.

This was the note that struck a responsive one in the breasts of the Blackfeet. They could understand the emotion of gratitude, although they were not particularly affected with it themselves.

So long as the Antelope did not choose to interfere with any of their schemes, so long was he safe; but none knew better than he the danger he would incur by crossing their path. Their fleeing from him showed that, while holding the female captives, they did not desire his company. He was prevented, or more properly induced, to forego his intention of overhauling them, on account of the accident to his horse; but he approached near enough to identify several of the Indians as members of his own clan, and dwellers in the same village with him.

The Antelope was now engaged on one of the most dangerous expeditions he had ever undertaken; for it was his intention to do all he could to rescue both the white and black captives from their captors, no matter how great the personal risk thereby incurred. He had held but comparatively a short companionship with Mentreose, but it had been long enough to develop quite a strong friendship between the two.

As they were now in the heart of the Blackfoot country, Mentreose was in more personal danger than he imagined, the presence of the Antelope affording him less security than he believed.

The journey during the forenoon was over the same broken country to which we have already referred, and Mentreose urged his companion to ride upon his horse; but the other peremptorily refused.

"When Antelope tired—den ax to ride."

"There is no use of waiting until then I have ridden so long that it would relieve me to walk."

"Walk den," was the sensible response.

"Will you ride?"

"No."

"Then I will keep on my horse," said the young man, who, while willing to walk, still thought it better to ride, so long as his animal showed no signs of fatigue, as he had no gait short of a most exhausting one that could equal the peculiar, light step of the Antelope, whose muscles seemed made of steel, ever elastic, ever tireless, and in their normal condition when in rapid motion.

The journey was continued, with scarcely an interruption, until noon. Buffalo, deer and antelope were encountered at all times, and could have been easily shot, without moving from their path, but they passed them by without disturbance, until they were ready for dinner. It was a pleasant day, with a clear sky and mild sun, that made walking or riding a pleasant recreation.

Numerous streams of all kinds were encountered, and near noon they came upon the banks of one of a size large enough to bear the name of river. While going up the bank of this, searching for a good fording-place, they came upon a camp-fire.

The Antelope was the first to discover it, in the shape of a mass of smoke, making its way through the tops of some trees. The smoke was thick and heavy, so as to be easily seen by any one who chanced to look toward it.

"White man!" exclaimed the Blackfoot.

"Don't be in such a hurry. I'd advise you to wait till you know something about it."

"Do know," was the emphatic response.

"I'll wager my horse against your gun that you don't know, and that it is an Indian."

The Antelope unhesitatingly accepted the bet, each party mentally resolving that if he won, he would not claim the stakes. The two began creeping through the grove from which the smoke issued, and simultaneously discovered that both were wrong, and consequently each had lost his wager.

There was one man stretched out in front of the big fire, whose appearance showed that it had been burning some time.

That man was the negro Pomp, the servant of Colonel Mulford. His horse was contentedly cropping the grass and herbage near at hand, while the darky himself had wadded up some leaves for a pillow, and was as happily sleeping as if in his own trundle-bed at home, with no such thing as Indians of the Blackfoot order in existence.

Mentrose and the Antelope looked at each other, and could scarcely keep from laughing out, at the scene before them. It was so unexpected, and each had been so completely deceived, that it presented itself in all its absurdity to both of them at the same moment.

"Who he?" asked the Blackfoot, laying his hand angrily upon his knife.

"He is a friend," said Mentrose, who recognized Pomp. "I have seen him before."

"Who he?" repeated the Indian.

"Wait and you'll see."

At the same time he moved forward and gave Pomp a shove with his foot. It required considerable more vigor than this, before he was aroused, and then he stared around some time, apparently at a loss to understand who he was, and anxious for some one to introduce him to himself.

"Hello! dat you, Masser Mentrose?" he finally asked, rubbing his eyes.

"Yes; what are you doing in this part of the world?"

"I don't know—yes I does," he added, as his faculties began to brighten up. "I's lookin' for Missus Olive and me mudder."

"Where are they?"

"Dat jist what I'd like to know."

After the departure of Burt Bunker from the fort at Beaver River Agency, Pomp was left without any one to advise him. He was welcome to remain there as long as he chose; but he could not do so while his mother and Olive Mulford were in danger. He was allowed to take one of the horses belonging to the colonel, and started on his search.

He had learned, since living in this wild region, that the Blackfeet came from the north and north-west, and he concluded, very naturally, that his friends were in that direction. So he started off with no very well-defined idea of how he was

to attain his object, but with a determination that it should be done somehow.

And so he had drifted forward, halting and resting whenever he felt like it, until he built his camp-fire among the trees, where its smoke caught the eyes of the Antelope and his companion.

This was the country for royal game, and brief as had been the experience of the negro in the territory, he never wanted for food.

Of course, this was an unexpected addition to the party, and Mentreose was undecided whether to permit him to bear them company or not. The Antelope gave his consent with considerable hesitation, but it was finally agreed that the darky should go with them.

As it was high-noon, the pursuers made their dinner in the grove, from the game which Pompey had brought down, and with only a short pause they resumed their journey.

As they progressed, Mentreose saw that they were indeed penetrating deeper and deeper into the Blackfoot country. Every now and then they caught "sign," which tell the experienced hunter so plainly that his enemies are near him, and it required no little care on the part of the Antelope to avoid them.

Pomp proved a very tractable member of the party. He now and then put forth some original schemes for the pursuit and recapture of his friends, but, as they received no attention from his companions, he did not urge them very strenuously.

Several streams of considerable size were forded, and the country became more broken and undulating. At night they had penetrated so far to the northward, that, after selecting the most secure hiding-place, the Antelope forbade them building a fire.

"Blackfeet have eyes of eagles!" was the forcible reason for this prohibition, and no one ventured to dispute him.

So they lay down supperless, a trial which seemed to affect Pomp only, he declaring that he hadn't got used to living on nothing, and did not care about learning at his age.

The Antelope stood guard during the darkness, for, although he said nothing to his companions, yet he had discovered a few hours before that they were in the vicinity of a large war-

party of his people, who would make short work of Men-trose and Pomp, if they should discover them.

It was an anxious night for the sentinel, and never did the lioness watch its young more faithfully than did he. The proximity of a cañon, with its incessant roar, prevented his customary reliance upon his acute sense of hearing, and he offset this disadvantage by making a circuit around them every few minutes through the entire night.

His friends had been asleep about a couple of hours, when he discovered that snow was again drifting down among the trees. It was in fine silvery particles, and the air became quite cold.

The snow continued falling all night, but so lightly that when morning dawned only about an inch covered the ground. This, however, greatly increased their danger, as they could not avoid leaving such a palpable trail, that if it were crossed or seen by any of the roving Blackfeet about them, their identity would be discovered on the instant.

What to do was the all-important question.

The Antelope, however, proved equal to the emergency.

He decided that their horses must be abandoned, and left where they were until they could return and claim them, after the recapture of the fugitives.

They were near quite a large stream, one of the main tributaries of the upper Yellowstone, which made a long *détour* toward the north before it made its sweeping bend, and emptied into this great river of the North-west. It was his purpose to reach this as stealthily as possible, and then proceed as far as practicable in a canoe.

It will be seen at once that there was an immense advantage in this, as they escaped altogether the necessity of leaving

trail behind them—that betrayer of hundreds of explorers who have ventured into a savage wilderness, and whose death has followed from its discovery by their foes.

There were still two obstacles to overcome, which, slight in themselves still might prove serious ones before they were surmounted. The distance intervening between them and the river was the dangerous point, and after reaching the stream, there was a probability but no certainty of finding the indispensable canoe.

Mentrose and Pomp had both conformed to the usages of the country so far as to wear moccasins, although the negro's feet, very naturally, were of enormous size. For the purpose of misleading any who might discover their trail, the Anteiope instructed them to turn their feet neither in nor out, while walking. Mentrose found no difficulty in obeying him, but it was not so easy for Pomp.

"My feet's 'customed to turnin' out, and it takes a good deal ob work to turn 'em in," he remarked, as he did his best to obey.

However, they hurried forward, and reached the river without disturbance or difficulty. Here their good-fortune was such that they found the very canoe, within a few feet of where they struck the bank.

In a few minutes all three were in it, and the Antelope showed scarcely less skill in handling the oar than he did in handling his legs. Helped by the current, the boat skimmed rapidly forward, the Blackfoot keeping close to shore and never relaxing his watchfulness. At noon they halted, kindled a fire and cooked some fish that their guide had caught.

Finally, when it began to grow dark, the Antelope landed once more, with the announcement that the river could help them forward no further, and all they had to do was to content themselves in patience until his return.

Mentrose and Pomp were within ten miles of the Blackfoot village, and here they were to wait through the long, dark hours, until the return of the Antelope and the captives. He had promised to be back by daylight, with news of their friends.

It was a frosty night, with no moon, and they had been forbidden to start any fire, so that all they could do was to wait and watch, wait and watch—dreary enough indeed for Mentrose, whose feelings were wrought up to painful intensity.

Pomp wrapped himself up in his blanket, and was soon sound asleep, while Mentrose paced back and forth, by the bank of the silently sweeping river, his thoughts far away.

Beautiful Olive Mulford! How he had loved her when he was thrown into her enchanting society, many hundred miles from here. How she had been sought after by scores, who

were no less fascinated by her peerless face and form than by her rare amiability and matchless grace of manner.

He had sought her with the undeviating affection of the true lover, until her eye had learned to brighten at his coming, and he had begun to experience the blissful certainty of love's young dream, with the more blissful consciousness that it was returned by the object of his affection.

And then had come the sudden summons that removed her so abruptly that he was not given the time to hasten home and bid her good-by. As he had declared to the trapper, they were not betrothed—that is, the irrevocable word had not been spoken, but each loved the other with the whole warmth of their pure, generous natures, and had not Colonel Mulford been called away so suddenly, the betrothal would have taken place.

Hour after hour passed in this lonely pacing—hour after hour, until it began to grow light, and then through the dim, misty gray, the figure of the Antelope appeared.

And this was the import of his message.

Neither Olive Mulford nor her servant were in the village, had not been there, nor did the Blackfeet know where they were!

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRAIRIE STEED.

WHEN assured of her escape from the power of the Blackfeet, Olive Mulford had fallen into their hands again.

No pen can describe the utter desolation of heart that came over her, as the savage gripped the bit of the horse and announced himself in the words which we have given. She was so completely overcome, that for a few moments she was entirely helpless and speechless.

Not until her captor had led her animal some distance, did she fully comprehend her situation, and that she had utterly thrown away the golden opportunity that she had in her grasp.

Back again to captivity with all its attendant horrors !
She would not do it ; she would escape again !

The Blackfoot still held the rein in his hand, when she gave it a jerk, and called to her horse. Obedient to her command, he made a plunging leap, but the wily red-skin was prepared for this, and with his iron grasp speedily brought him down to subjection again.

"Kill pale-face !" he muttered. "Keep still—scalp."

"Kill me then !" exclaimed Olive, in the depth of her despair and wee ; but the Blackfoot unquestionably meant it as an extinguisher of any scheme of flight that she might entertain.

The driving snow and cold air gradually cooled the fever in the veins of Olive Mulford, and she soon saw the unwise and sinful feelings that had held sway in her breast a short time before.

Back again to captivity ; it was a dreary prospect indeed, but the same hand that had upheld her thus far, would not forsake her then, and something like a reaction from the despair which had pressed her down came over her, and "eternal hope" sprung up again.

On, on through the blinding snow and darkness tramped the horses, more wearied with the constantly accumulating snow beneath their feet than an hour's full run over the open prairie could have made.

On, on, hour after hour, until Olive wondered by what subtle instinct the Blackfoot could keep the right direction, when there were no stars and no guiding-mark at all.

He must be going astray ; she was sure of it.

Oh, if he would but only fall into the common mistake of wandering in a circle, and the day would give her another opportunity to make her attempt to escape. Surely he could not be going aright with no landmark to guide him.

Such were the thoughts that passed through the mind of Olive Mulford, as she took her memorable night-ride in a snow-storm, with no companion but a Blackfoot Indian.

It was a long and dreary night, thus plodding onward through the snow and darkness, and she felt no little compassion for her horse, who had been on the go for so many hours, and to whom the savage did not show the least pity or indulgence.

The gradual lightening of the darkness finally showed that day was breaking, and shortly after the storm decreased at that point which had been reached by the two, although, as will be remembered, Burt Bunker and Pomp scarcely got out of it before noon.

Olive looked anxiously around her, but saw nothing of the rest of the Blackfeet, and was beginning to hope that they had wandered hopelessly away from the one with her, when she heard a whoop, to which her captor instantly responded.

This interchange of signals continued for some time, the sounds showing that they were gradually approaching each other, until our heroine caught sight of the entire party, with her servant Polly among them.

"Lor' bless yer! w'at did yer come back fur?" demanded the negress, as she recognized her.

"I couldn't help it—"

Her feelings, suppressed so long, now overcame her, and she sobbed as if her heart was breaking. Melted with pity, Polly moved her horse toward her, for the purpose of taking her head upon her shoulder and offering her sympathy, but she was rudely thrust back by one of the Indians.

"W'at do yer mean?" demanded the negress, glaring at the Blackfoot like a tiger. "Y'u're nuffin' but a red nigger any way."

The savage placed his hand very threateningly upon his knife, and alarmed for the safety of her friend, Olive looked up, and besought her to be quiet for her sake.

"Wonder ef dat ole fool t'inks I's afeard ob him?" growled Polly, as she scowled sideways at him. "I'd jist like to tear his eyes out."

"For my sake, restrain your temper," pleaded Olive.

"I'll do't, Lor' bless yer soul; I'll do any thing fur yer," replied Polly, giving way now to her feelings, but speedily gaining the mastery of them again.

The onward journey was resumed, and in the course of an hour they reached ground where scarcely any snow had fallen, and where the storm had entirely ceased. Selecting a good camping-site, a halt was made and all dismounted.

Both Polly and Olive were so chilled from riding on horse-back through the cold for so many hours, that they could

scarcely stand. They were a-hungered, and sorely in need of rest and refreshment.

The Blackfeet speedily had a large fire kindled, and a dinner preparing, while the captives warmed themselves as best they could at the fire. When a bountiful supply of meat was prepared, they were given all they could desire, and neither hesitated to eat her fill.

Olive was not a little surprised at the good treatment she had received up to this time. No insult had been offered her, and considering that she was in the power of one of the most dangerous and treacherous of the Indian tribes of the Northwest, she had every reason to be grateful for the lenience they had displayed from the very moment of her captivity.

It was a wonder indeed, when the action of Polly especially is called to mind, that some of those who understood her words and spirit, did not bury their tomahawks in her brain. Perhaps they were only "biding their time."

Something like an hour's halt was made, and then the journey was resumed. The substantial meal, and the warmth of the roaring camp-fire, caused the captives to feel quite comfortable, although they could not feel otherwise than heartsickened at the knowledge that every hour was taking them further away from friends, and all prospect of rescue.

The Blackfeet seemed to have no fear of pursuit, and kept along at a moderate pace, their horses scarcely ever going faster than a walk, except when they reached a broad stretch of prairie, when they were put to the highest rate of speed for an hour or more.

This was on the occasion when the Antelope made the attempt to join company with them, although neither Olive nor Polly understood the cause of such haste.

With the disappearance of the pursuer, the Blackfeet settled down to their old steady gait, which was continued until noon, when another halt of an hour or so was made, and dinner eaten.

They had scarcely started, when Olive discovered that something was the matter with her horse. He shivered and staggered in such a way as to alarm her and attract the attention of the Indians. She saw that he was likely to fall any moment, and she prepared herself for it.

Sure enough, in less than a mile he stopped walking, gave a more violent shiver, and then fell, and rolled over so suddenly that Olive had barely time to save herself from being crushed beneath him.

The animal was evidently dying, and his rider was never more to ride him.

Several of the Indians dismounted, and approached the beast to examine him. It took but a few moments for them to see that nothing more was to be expected of him, and one of the Blackfeet, with commendable humanity, sunk his keen tomahawk into the head of the animal, with such fearful force, that his suffering was ended at once and forever.

Olive was not a little affected at the loss of her favorite horse, but a singular discovery quickly changed her feelings. She was placed upon the back of a small, black, fiery mustang, one of the cleanest-limbed and swiftest animals that ever existed; but, as she was about to mount him, she recognized the horse as her own property.

It was he that had been presented to her, by her father, when she first came into this solitude. Colonel Mulford had bought him of a Texan ranger, and knew him to be one of the fleetest and most enduring animals of that famous breed. He soon displayed a deep and intelligent affection for his mistress, who valued him above any thing else of the brute creation that she had ever owned.

She frequently rode him without any bridle, his obedience to her voice being perfect. He would run to her whenever she came from the house, and was never so happy as when she was fondling him, or when, mounted upon his back, he was careering with the speed of the wind over the prairie.

The grief of Olive Mulford, therefore, will be understood, when, one morning, Pet, as she had named him, failed to answer her call, and the discovery was soon made that he had been stolen. An examination of the ground showed that a single Indian had entered the stable during the night, and made off with him.

Colonel Mulford made every effort to recover the mustang. He offered a large reward to all the Blackfeet, with whom he came in contact at the agency, for his return; but he heard nothing of him, and finally gave up the search.

Months had passed, and now, by a curious concurrence of circumstances, Olive Mulford was upon his back again! What was better, Pet also recognized his mistress, showing it in a manner that could not be mistaken, careering, curveting, and whinnying his joy, and ready to do her bidding, and waiting only for the command.

Indeed, the animal had known her from the first, and made more than one effort to approach her, but the iron hand of his master had curbed him, and his manifestations of delight, until now when they were brought together again.

Somehow or other, the very instant Olive mounted him, a curious, exultant feeling came over her. It was not the natural pleasure that was to be expected from the mere reunion of the two friends, but something deeper than that. In truth, it was an expectation, amounting almost to a certainty, that this same mustang was to prove the means of her escape from the Blackfeet.

So great was her faith in this, that the fair girl could not restrain her delight. Her face glowed, and the old smile came back so radiantly that Polly noticed it.

"Lor' 'a' massy, Miss Olive, what's de matter?"

"Nothing; why do you ask?"

"I never see'd ye look so happy like. If it war me, I should feel orful' after de red nigger had scalped my hoss, but you don't seem to mind it a bit, 'cept to feel better."

"Have you ever seen this pony before now that I am riding?"

Polly scanned it a moment, and then exclaimed :

"De Lor' be praised if it ain't Pet!"

"I thought a good deal of the other horse," said Olive, "and am sorry he had to be killed, but I never loved him as I do Pet; and now, Polly," she added, in a cautious tone, "if you once get a chance to run away on your horse, do so, without waiting for me, for I shall follow as soon as I can, as you must do, if I get the start."

The negress nodded to signify that she understood matters, and that she would do her part better than before, if the opportunity should come.

The thoughts of Olive Mulford once more turned toward escape—she scarcely thought of any thing else. The mustang

was fleeter, even, than her former horse, and she wondered why she had not been retaken when she first attempted flight. She could only account for it by the supposition that Pet did not participate in the pursuit, or else went astray.

When night began descending upon the prairie, they were in a hilly, broken country, wilder than any over which they had yet journeyed. In some respects this was more favorable for flight, while it was also disadvantageous in other respects.

Olive finally determined to make her attempt just as they were going into camp, as the confusion at such a time seemed more likely to be favorable. She managed to apprise Polly of her intentions, and told her that in case she succeeded, she would await her coming on the bank of the large stream that they had crossed early in the afternoon, near where the large oak stood that had been shivered by lightning.

It was early in the evening that the Blackfeet drew rein, near a small stream of water, and began dismounting. They were all about Olive, for they evidently felt the necessity of watching her. Under some pretense, she managed to keep upon Pet until all the others were upon the ground. Then, when their attention was withdrawn, she gave the word to the mustang, and off he bounded like a meteor.

It was a brilliant *coup*, and succeeded by its very boldness. The Blackfeet were all admirable riders, and a half-dozen vaulted upon the backs of their animals and were off in a twinkling; but, quick as they were, the fugitive had gained a good start, which was improved to the utmost. The mustang seemed to be wild with delight, at the consciousness that he bore his beloved mistress on his back, and his magnificent powers were put to the highest stretch. Never before had he flown over the earth with such marvelous swiftness, and the furious Blackfeet saw the horse and its fair rider speed up the hill, and then both were outlined for an instant against the starry sky beyond, when they plunged down in the darkness and disappeared. Reaching the top of the hill, horse and rider had vanished and were seen no more.

Higher and higher rose the spirits of Olive Mulford, as she flew over the ground, and she did not draw rein until she had gone several miles, when she gradually slackened the speed of her mustang down, at last to a dead halt.

By this time there was no light, except the feeble glimmering of the stars, nor did any sound reach her ears. She was free again, and not likely to commit her former blunder of running back into the hands of her enemies.

"Now, if Polly can be equally fortunate," thought she; "she has as good a horse as any of the Indians, and only wants such a start as I had to get away."

Carefully had she watched the landmarks in coming, in view of such a necessity as this, and she saw that she was adhering to the trail—a course that Polly would be obliged to follow to find her mistress.

Putting her mustang to an easy gallop, she continued her flight until she heard the murmur of the river, when she proceeded more cautiously to make sure of reaching it at the proper fording-place.

There was where she had agreed to wait for Polly, but prudence led her to cross to the other bank. The stream was quite shallow, and Pet was enabled to carry her across without permitting the water to touch her feet.

On the other bank she halted and waited for the coming of Polly.

It was dreary waiting, and her horse spent the time in cropping the grass, while she walked back and forth, ever vigilant to be sure that no enemy stole upon her unawares.

"Hello, dar, Miss Olly, whar be yer?"

It was the voice of Polly that came across the water, sounding far above the flow of the river.

"Are you alone?" called back Olive.

"'Course I is; who do yer s'pose would be wid me?"

"Come on, then."

In a few moments the two were clasped in each other's arms.

"It made such a high old row, when you slipped away so bootiful, dat I t'ought de time ob dis chile had come, and I straddled my hoss and put, too. Dey didn't keer so much 'bout me as dey did 'bout you, fur dar was only one dat chased me, and he shot his gun at me, as long as he could see me; but t'ank de Lord, I got away and here I is."

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

WHILE all these things were taking place, Burt Bunker, the trapper, mounted on his powerful Honeycomb, was leisurely pursuing his way toward the beaver-runs of the Yellowstone.

The slight part that he had borne in the incidents that we have described somewhat at length, as usual left little impression upon him, and, as was his custom, he put them behind him with the other thousand and one incidents of his career.

But as he rode along on the back of his horse, he found that there was one person at least whom he could not drive from his mind. He thought of the Antelope, as one of those extraordinary Indians such as he had encountered before, although none equaled him in his great attainment of running ; he recalled Pomp, and smiled at the recollection of the manner in which they first encountered ; he regretted that Colonel Mulford's daughter had been run away with by the Blackfeet, but hundreds of girls had undergone the same ordeal, and he hoped she would be as fortunate as some of them, and get out of their clutches again.

But Engene Mentreose—what was there in his face that haunted the trapper ? When he shut his eyes, it seemed to flit before him, and his thoughts wandered back to the camp-fire, where they had sat opposite, and the dark eyes and handsome features were turned earnestly upon him—and then back, through the long years, to *another*—how like !

" What made me let him go ? " he asked himself, impatiently. " I thought of it then, but it didn't strike me so hard, and skulp me if it don't keep growin' onto me all the time."

Now and then he heaved a great sigh, and then, in the hope of driving the troublous thoughts from his mind, he hurried his animal onward.

All day long, with scarcely an interruption, the journey was continued. When darkness put a stop to further progress,

he had not yet reached his destination, and he encamped on the shore of a river—so unknown that to this day it has not received a name.

He was in the Indian country, and he did not forget his caution and prudence. These, by the blessing of Heaven, carried him through the night, and the sun was hardly up, when he was *en route* again.

At noon his journey was ended; he was on his favorite trapping-ground.

Away up in the North-west, near the base of the Rocky Mountains, in the very heart of the Blackfoot country, where the trapper had spent the winters of many past years, he had come again to engage in the perilous task of catching beaver and otter.

As Burt dismounted from his horse, he looked about him, as does a man when he returns to his familiar home.

"It don't seem that the varmints have 'sturbed nothin'," he muttered, as he looked around preparatory to unloading his horse. "I take that as very lucky—hello!"

This exclamation was caused by the discovery that the large hollow oak, which for several years had served as his wilderness home, was demolished. It had been shivered to fragments by a bolt of lightning, so that scarcely any semblance of a tree remained.

"Now that's qu'ar," soliloquized the trapper, "smashed by lightnin'; ain't it good fur me that I wasn't in thar about that time, and didn't leave my traps thar? But I take that as a sign that this will be the last winter I'll ever spend in the trappin' profession. Whether I'm to go under or git wiped out, or whether somethin' is to happen that's to stop me some other way, I can't say—but I *know* it will be one or t'other."

This curious presentiment seemed to weigh him down for the time, but he resolutely faced the duty which lay before him.

Remounting his horse, he continued along the river for a half-mile or so, when he came to a high, precipitous bank, the rocks of which put back for a considerable distance. Some distance from the shore, he again halted and began unloading Honeycomb.

This was soon completed, and then he carried his luggage

into a rough cave, which was of considerable extent, and with but one opening visible—through which he made his entrance by stooping considerably. His blankets, extra ammunition and other luggage were thrown down in one corner, and then he came outside again.

Remounting his horse he rode him some distance to a deep valley, filled with luxuriant vegetation, even at this late season of the year, and abounding with cottonwood, where he turned him loose to remain until the winter was over, unless sooner needed.

Then he returned to the cave, and brought forth a number of beaver-traps. The afternoon was spent in placing and setting them, and before it was fairly dark, he had this part of his duty finished. All that now remained was to await the favors of fortune.

During these proceedings, the trapper had carefully reconnoitered the neighborhood to learn whether there were any "signs" of Indians, and whether the indications of a successful trapping season were favorable.

So far as he could judge every thing was as he could wish. His "grounds" bore no appearance of recent visitation from the Blackfeet, while there could be no question but the fur-bearing animals were all about him in large numbers.

When he reached his cavern-home, it was entirely dark. He kindled his fire and made his supper upon several plump fish that he had caught, and then, as he felt somewhat restless, he lit his pipe, and wandered down toward the river of which we have spoken.

All was still, and impressed by the sublimity of his surroundings, the trapper sat down upon the rocks, still thoughtfully smoking his clay pipe.

Overhead the stars twinkled, undimmed by a single cloud, while the soft murmur of the deep river at his feet was the only sound that reached his ear. Turning his eyes to the left, he could follow the stream by the reflection of the stars for some distance, until it wound around and disappeared among the woods and mountains. Looking again to the right, the same view met his gaze.

But hold !

While his eyes were wandering mechanically upward, to

where the river seemed to issue from the darkness itself, he suddenly saw a light flash out, as if a torch had been lighted and held aloft.

Instantly the trapper was alert. What did it mean?

Looking earnestly at it, for full a minute, he made the discovery that it was stationary.

This was a proof that it was either a signal or a campfire.

"That means red-skins," he muttered, as he still scrutinized it, "and that looks as though the varmints war comin' a *leetle* too close."

A few minutes more enabled him to locate it. It was on the opposite side of the river, and several hundred yards upstream. Kindled close to the river, only a slight undergrowth intervened to obstruct the view, and this did it so imperfectly that now and then he was enabled to distinguish a figure flit before it.

"Skulp me ef the varmints ain't thar sure," concluded Burt. "Thar's half a dozen of 'em too."

So much decided, the trapper was not the man to rest until he had discovered more.

"Wonder ef my canoe is whar I left it?"

As noiselessly as a phantom he stole down from the rocks, whereon he had been resting, and made his way some distance up the bank to a dense mass of shrubbery that overhung the water. A moment's search was only necessary for him to find the small birchen canoe, resting overturned and in precisely the same position he had left it the preceding spring, when, through with his winter's trapping, he concealed it, and, gathering his peltries together, started on his homeward trip to the States.

The trapper seemed quite pleased at the discovery, and he launched it with a silence that would not have alarmed a listening Blackfoot, had he been no more than a dozen yards away.

Lifting the long, Indian paddle, he was about to step into it, when he drew back, startled at a sound that had reached his ears.

That peculiar ripple which can be made only by the flirt of a paddle, was the sound that had arrested him so suddenly.

Listening intently, he detected the steady movement of the oar, and discovered still further that it was coming from the direction of the camp-fire and toward him.

This discovery was scarcely made, when another, equally important, made itself manifest, and that was that there was a second canoe, and it was pursuing the first.

Neither of the boats was visible, but in the stillness of the night, it was an easy matter to locate them by the ear.

"That looks as ef thar war whites somehow mixed up in this bus'ness," muttered the trapper, as he quietly stepped into his canoe, and held himself ready to join, or to refrain from joining in the contest.

"Ef it happens that thar be them of my own race," added Burt, "it's my principle to go in and help lift ha'r."

The steady, rapid sweep of the oars could now be plainly heard; and suddenly from the darkness above, shot the shadowy form of a canoe, in which were seated three individuals, one only of whom was paddling, and he handled the oar with a dexterity and skill which proved that he was either an Indian himself, or an experienced hunter.

As the boat came nearer, the trapper scanned it closely, and was not long in discovering that the man who was using the long paddle with such rare skill was really an Indian.

Burt Bunker growled his disgust.

"It's dog eat dog, and hyar's as hopes they'll keep it up till thar ain't none of 'em left to plague hunters like me."

When the foremost canoe was nearly abreast, the trapper made a second discovery, which wrought quite a change in his feelings. One of the other inmates of the boat, at least, was a white man, and consequently the Indian with him was a friend.

"That thar makes things look different," concluded the trapper, as he began moving his boat along the shore, so as to keep nearly abreast with the other, and hold himself ready to participate in the encounter, whenever the opportune moment should come.

Only a few seconds elapsed, when the second and the pursuing canoe came in sight, and in it were visible the tufted heads of four red-skins, two of whom were using their paddles with rare strength and skill.

Here was an interesting state of affairs, and the trapper came to the conclusion that he had a duty to perform in the matter. It happened that both were going against the current, which being more rapid in the center, caused them to work at less advantage than Burt, who plied his paddle with noiseless skill, and experienced no difficulty in equaling their speed.

The trapper made sure that one of the fugitives was of his own race, and that all of the pursuers were "varmints," and when he had done this, he had selected his friends and enemies.

His next point was to ascertain the degree of danger in which the fugitives were placed, which was to be done by comparing their respective rates of speed.

It required but a few minutes to do this, and the result was the knowledge that the larger party were gaining quite slowly, but none the less surely upon the other, and it followed, as an inevitable consequence, that, unless the latter put in shore, and took advantage of the many facilities for concealment, they would soon be overhauled.

As silently as the sweep of the swallow's wing, skimmed the canoe of Burt Bunker. He had been up and down this river so often, that he could traverse it as well at night as during the daytime, and it would have seemed marvelous could one have seen the manner in which he glided in and out, following the windings and turnings of the shore, with a mathematical exactness.

"Skulp me! why don't they give 'em a rip and then dodge in to shore?" exclaimed Burt, who could not see how any thing was to be gained by the fugitives in such a chase as this. "Ef they don't do it purty soon, I will."

Not the crack of a rifle, nor a solitary yell came from the pursuer or pursued. They were all too deep in dead earnest to waste their time in useless demonstrations, and each saved his strength for the final assault.

This curious chase was continued in this manner for fully a quarter of a mile. The fleeing Indian had shown such surprising dexterity in the use of his paddle, that by the help of one or two "spurts" he had lost a much less part of his advantage, than the trapper had anticipated.

But the fact was none the less positive, that the foremost was steadily losing ground. There seemed to be no one in it, except the savage, who was capable of using the implement with any effect, while the dead weight of the other two was too much disadvantage for him to overcome.

There must be a termination of this race very soon. Muscles of steel could not stand the strain to which the fleeing Indian had put his limbs ever since the chase began. The marvel to the trapper was that he could hold out, even for so short a time.

Burt Bunker laid down his paddle, and took up "Betsey Jane," his long, formidable rifle. For one instant it was pointed like the finger of fate, out in the darkness, then there was a flash, a sharp crack, followed by a wild yell, and one of the pursuing Indians flung his paddle overboard, and in his death-frenzy plunged headlong after it.

"*Come this hyar way!*" called out the trapper to the fugitives, who were scarcely less amazed than were their enemies. "*Come this way, and be powerful quick 'bout it, too!*"

But there was no supposing that such a voice belonged to an enemy, and there was scarce an instant's hesitation upon the part of the foremost canoe, whose prow was turned to the left, in obedience to the imperative command that had rung out with such startling effect upon the still night-air.

The wildest consternation filled the second canoe, at the discharge of the deadly bullet, followed by the thunderous command of the trapper. All had seen the flash of the rifle, so that they knew that some third party had appeared upon the scene, and one who was not afraid to declare upon which side he belonged.

There was a moment's halt at the disappearance of their comrade, who went down out of sight in the deep water, but in a moment came up again, close to the canoe, when he was instantly seized by several hands and drawn into the boat, while others picked up the paddle that was floating away from them.

The Indian was found to be quite dead, but they retained him, so as to prevent his prized scalp-lock falling into the hands of an enemy.

The killing of the Blackfoot, the recovery of his body, and

the resumption of the paddles occupied nearly a minute's time. The consternation of the Indians had not been of that bewildering character that caused them to lose sight of their foes.

They saw the turn of the canoe, and it had scarcely glided into the bank of shadow thrown out by the vegetation along the shore, when they were after it.

Burt expected this, and the instant they touched land, the fugitives sprung out, and ran over the broken, hilly ground, and through the vegetation, that was so intricate in some places as to seriously retard their progress. They were at no great distance from his cavern home, and seeing that the only safety lay in reaching that place, he headed straight for it.

"Foller me, and I'll take keer of yer!" he called out, seeing some disposition upon the part of his companions to "scatter."

There were scarcely two of the company who could run at the same rate of speed, but they persevered, and finally reached the refuge. The trapper placed himself by the door, and glanced at each as he dodged in, the faint starlight just enabling him to do so.

"Skulp me, ef thar ain't the darky, and thar follers Mint Rose, and that air streak o' lightnin' mounted on legs, that goes by the name of the Antelope."

The trapper was right. The three individuals, identified in his characteristic way, were his guests for the present at least.

CHAPTER IX.

BURSTING FROM COVER.

A FEW words are needed at this point by way of understanding the incidents that follow.

When the Antelope made his stolen visit to his village, he learned from those whom he could implicitly trust, that the

captives had not yet reached the village, nor had any thing been heard of the party, who, there was reason to believe, had them in hand.

This much learned, nothing was to be gained by remaining longer in the village. The Antelope, therefore, spent a half-hour with his family, and then set out upon his return.

A half-mile or more out on the way, he encountered three mounted Blackfeet returning to the village. He exchanged salutations with them, and was not long in learning that they belonged to the marauding party who had abducted Colonel Mulford's daughter and her servant. He learned further that the two had effected their escape in a clever manner, and that the rest of the party had gone in pursuit, while they, considering their services not needed, and having been engaged on a long expedition, were returning home.

The Antelope had learned all that was possible or necessary, and he returned with the three to the village, where he secured a horse and set out to rejoin his friends, who were awaiting him. When near Mentreose, he dismounted and approached him on foot, so as not to alarm him into discharging his rifle at him, under the impression that he was a hostile Blackfoot stealing upon him for the purpose of murder.

This discovery necessitated a total change of tactics. While there was every reason to rejoice at the flight of Olive Mulford and her servant, there were still grounds for the gravest apprehensions of their safety.

They had been carried so far to the northward, and so entirely away from that portion of the country with which they were acquainted, that it was hardly possible for them to find their way back to the Beaver River Agency without assistance. They were so well mounted that there was little fear of their being overhauled in a fair chase, the mustang of Olive, especially, being so fleet and long-winded, that nothing on the plains could hope to rival her.

But, in their wanderings over the prairie, they would be certain to become bewildered, entangled, and very likely inextricably lost. Such being the case, there could be little doubt but that the cunning Blackfeet would be enabled to trap them again. It was, therefore, decided by the Antelope to start also upon the back-trail, in the search for the fugitives, avoiding

at the same time making themselves visible to the Blackfeet—a delicately difficult undertaking, when it is remembered that the latter were between the fugitives and Antelope and his party.

The disparity of the opposing forces was such that nothing could be hoped for in the way of a running or stand-up fight. The great object of the Antelope, therefore, was to come up to Olive Mulford, and then act as her escort to the fort.

A hasty breakfast was eaten, and by the time it was fairly light, the three were under way. The Blackfoot had gained a general knowledge of the course taken by the other party, which fortunately led them near the grove where their horses had been left, thus enabling them to "kill two birds with one stone."

Instead of calling into use the canoe, which had done them such a good turn, they struck straight across the country for the timber, where they hoped their animals were awaiting them. The Antelope refused to mount his horse so long as his companions had none, and Pomp and Mentreose took turns, the former doing about three-fourths of the riding that was done.

Their Indian guide kept about a hundred yards in advance, so as to detect the very first sign of danger, and thus to prevent their running blindly into it.

Pomp was not of much account, it is true, and it will be remembered that he was not the first choice as a companion in the business; but, having once secured his presence, he could not very well be dispensed with, and there was no telling but what the time was at hand when his services could be made useful.

It was quite early in the forenoon when the timber was reached, where, to their delight, they found the two horses undisturbed, and very little discommodeed by the slight fall of snow. In a twinkling, all three were mounted, and each possessing a goodly rifle, they were ready for the work before them.

"Golly! jis' let 'em come!" exclaimed Pomp, as he swelled up at the idea of his own importance.

"What will you do, if they should make their appearance?" asked Mentreose.

"I'd *lebe*," was the truthful reply. "Dis yah hoss know~~s~~ how to run, and I'm de one dat would make him go, ef I got de chance."

"You will doubtless get all the chance you want," responded our hero, "but don't be in too much of a hurry to get away. Wait till you see us leaving before you run."

"Oh, golly, I'll stick to *you*, 'cause I know you's goin' on a hunt for my mammy and de blessed Miss Olly dat's wid her."

"Yes, Pomp, and if you have any love for them, you now have a chance to show it. You must be brave, and do whatever the Antelope commands."

"Dat I will."

The negro was earnest in his promise, and if he could screw up his courage to the sticking point, it was by no means impossible that it might be his fortune to handle his rifle to some advantage.

Numerous trails were crossed ; so numerous, indeed, that had Mentreose been alone, he would have been hopelessly bewildered ; but the Antelope gave them scarcely more than a glance. On, on they pressed, galloping where the ground would permit, and only walking their animals when compelled to do so.

It was about noon when they descended a small wooded ridge of hills, and the Antelope gave a suppressed whoop.

"What is it?" asked Mentreose, hastening to his side.

The Blackfoot pointed to the ground, where the imprint of horses' feet could be plainly seen. He explained further that this was the back-trail of the *fugitives* themselves. Over this ground Olive Mulford had passed when fleeing from her captors, and the horse of the negress Polly, led by some strange instinct, had followed in the footsteps of her mustang, so that from this point the two trails were side by side.

The warmth of the sun, slight as it was, soon dissolved the thin sheet of snow with which the earth was covered, but the track of the pursuing and pursued horsemen was so distinct that even the stupid Pomp could see it, and no impediment at all to their speed was caused on that account.

After crossing the stream, where Polly joined her mistress, it was not long before the signs indicated that the fugitives

had already gone astray. Where she ought to have turned to the right, Olive Mulford had gone to the left, and when she doubtless imagined that she was rapidly approaching Beaver River Fort, every minute was carrying her further away from it.

The pursuit was continued all through the afternoon, and at nightfall the signs indicated that they were close upon their friends, and consequently closer still to the Blackfeet.

Indeed, the indications became so distinct that the Antelope slackened the speed of all considerably. Late in the day, he ascended another ridge of hills, from the top of which he caught sight of the Blackfeet, encamped a short distance away on the bank of a large stream; but he could detect nothing of the fugitives themselves. He made a careful scrutiny of the camp so far as was possible in the gathering darkness, but could learn nothing regarding the friends whom they were so anxious to reach and help.

He surmised, however, that they were at no great distance beyond, and further up the stream. Acting upon this supposition, he was about to complete his reconnoissance on foot, when his mind was changed by his stumbling upon a canoe.

Concealing their horses as best they could, they cautiously ascended the stream until opposite the camp-fire, when they began reconnoitering the red-skin party, and almost at the same moment were discovered by the Blackfeet, who, instead of firing into them from the shore, and killing the whole three, as they easily could have done, began a pursuit the particulars of which have already been given the reader.

Burt Bunker had no intention of being hermetically sealed up with his companion in the cavern. He had not selected it with any design of standing a siege, it being his purpose to keep such a watch of "sign" as to prevent the possibility of such a thing occurring.

Once within these stone walls, they were deprived of the means of obtaining food and water, and could fire at none of their enemies except such as should be kind enough to present themselves in front.

Instead, therefore, of following his friends into the cavern, the trapper waited on the outside. He stood with rifle in hand, prepared to shoot the first red-skin that showed himself in the hope of driving back the party for the time at least.

But no tufted, coppery head presented itself, and he suspected the true reason. Thrusting his head into the entrance that led into the cavern, he called out, in a suppressed voice:

"See hyar! the varmints have gone back fur the rest, and it won't do fur us to be cotched hyar. Git yer guns ready to travel."

"Golly! I sh'd like to have sumfin' to eat afore I goes," whined Pomp. "I feels orful holler."

"Keep that black mouth shet, or I'll make ye holler more yit," growled the trapper.

There was wisdom in the words of the grizzled old hunter, and the Antelope would have proposed the same thing as soon as he could have precisely learned what the situation was. The cavern had been resorted to as a temporary refuge, to be held only while the peril was so imminent.

Once outside, Mentreose briefly explained what had happened since he separated from the trapper. Before the latter made any reply, he led them some distance away, where the whole party were concealed among the closely-growing trees.

"I see," he returned. "Yer arter the women—the black and the white one."

"Specially de black one," interposed Pomp.

"It seems to me that they can not be far away," interposed Mentreose; "at least, the Antelope thinks so."

"The Antelope is right, as a red-skin is purty apt to be in such a kind of business. The women can't be fur away, and if we kin only find 'em we won't want nothin' better."

"Antelope look."

And before any one could interpose, the friendly Indian had vanished like an arrow in the forest.

"Now, what shall we do?" asked Mentreose. "Stay here till he comes back?"

"Which side of the river are yer animiles?"

"On this side; when we found the canoe we went over to the other side, toward the camp-fire."

"We'll hunt the hosses, so as to be ready, and while you're gittin' your'n together, I'll go and spring the traps—fur this begins to look as though I must git out of this part of the world, and I don't want to leave any of the beaver to die in the traps."

I took but a few minutes to arrange a plan of procedure, and the parties separated. The rough but kind-hearted trapper faithfully went from trap to trap, and sprung each and every one, to make sure that there was no possibility of any of the innocent beavers dying a languishing death through his remissness. Then he hunted up his horse, mounted, and rode him to the place that had been agreed upon as a rendezvous. Mentreose and Pomp were awaiting him, but none had seen or heard any thing of the Antelope.

No little caution was necessary in moving about at such a time as this, as the Blackfeet on the other side of the stream were alert, and there was good reason to believe that some of them were scouting and prowling about on this side of the river, preparing to make a swoop on the party of whites that would not leave one of them living.

But the darkness of the night had been turned to such good account that the whereabouts of our friends remained unsuspected up to this time, but there could be no certainty as to how long it would continue.

The three were seated upon the backs of their horses, that were reined up under a cluster of trees, where the shadows were so dense that they could make sure of being invisible to any one a dozen feet away. Mentreose and the Antelope had been together so long, that a signal had been arranged between them, and upon that alone our hero depended for the guidance of their ally to their hiding-place.

Burt Bunker felt that his presentiment was about to be verified. He sat on his horse, with his rifle grasped, and his face turned toward the south-east, where lay the home from which he had strayed forty years ago.

The trapping-season had just begun; but he felt no reluctance at leaving the grounds. He had no desire even to conceal his canoe and traps, as had always been his custom when starting from the States, but left all (except the mere springing of the traps) as he had often fancied that it would be his fate to leave them, when he should finally go under, "wiped out" by the ball of some vengeful Blackfoot, who had dogged his footsteps like the famishing prairie-wolf.

Whence this feeling? What meant that shiver that now and then shook the immense frame of the trapper, as he other-

wise sat so motionless upon his horse? Why did he turn his eyes with such earnest longing upon the figure of Eugene Mentreose, as he could barely discern it in the darkness?

Such strange emotions swayed him to the very soul that he could scarcely refrain from crying out. Memory was busy with the teeming Past—and so well did she do her duty, that her scenes were fearfully vivid, and caused him to think for the time that they were indeed real.

But the strata of many long years lay upon his heart, and this earthquake did not break but only loosened these impervious strata, and they speedily settled back in place again.

The tempest was past, and the swaying oak righted itself, with its roots as firm and far-reaching as ever. Burt Bunker was himself again—hard, stern and immovable.

"If the Antelope only discovers Olive Mulford and her servant?"

"Then we'll jine in and strike a bee-line fur Beaver River Agency, fur I don't s'pose ye like this part the country well 'nough to settle down in it."

"I rather think not."

"Thar be ruther too many of the varmints to make it jist the place to put up a country-seat—leastways, till some more of the reds git wiped out."

Every now and then Mentreose gave utterance to his signal—a peculiar whistle, such as more than one species of night-bird is frequently heard to make at night. As yet there had been no response; but suddenly there came a reply, so clear and distinct, that all knew their friend could be but a short distance away.

Suddenly the Antelope bounded among them, apparently in great excitement.

"White woman, black woman, ober dere—close by—come quick!"

He had scarcely uttered the words, when he had vaulted upon his horse and was thundering away, with the rest plunging after him.

CHAPTER X.

THE HOUNDS UNLEASHED.

OLIVE MULFORD and her servant were sorely in need of help. They had been deprived of their weapons, when captured by the Blackfeet, so they were destitute of that means of procuring food.

Still they anticipated little trouble until they made the discovery that they had gone altogether astray, and had not the remotest idea of the direction to take in order to reach their friends.

The consequence was that they found themselves in constant danger of being recaptured by Indians, who kept appearing at the most unexpected times, and in the most unlooked-for places. Sometimes they seemed to spring up from the very ground, and came thundering toward them, with such frightful shrieks and yells, as almost to terrify them into submission.

But it was sport to the mustang, who shot away again and again, like the arrow from the bow, and whose wonderful speed so fired up the other that he did passing well. The superior speed and endurance of their horses proved their safety again and again ; but they were almost worn out by the constant watchfulness thus imposed.

More than once were they fired at by the yelling demons, and frequently it seemed as if they were saved by the direct interposition of Providence. When their hunger became great, they lived upon wild berries that were found growing here and there. As they had no means of obtaining any of the fish or wild game, so abundant about them, this was the only sustenance possible.

Polly showed a most decided affection to her young mistress. All the hardihood and endurance for which the African race are noted seemed gathered in her. She appeared absolutely incapable of fatigue, and compelled Olive to sleep, when the latter insisted upon alternating with her.

"Bress you, little honey!" she would exclaim, as she drew

the beautiful head over in her lap, "I doesn't want to sleep ; I couldn't do it if I tried. Jis' shet yer eyes, say yer prayers, and I'll wake yer when the time comes."

"Don't forget, Polly ; for you know we have no guns, and, under Heaven, we must depend upon our horses. If there comes the least danger, you must not fail to wake me."

"There, there ! shet yer purty eyes ; you're talking too much I'll sit here and pray, and be sure to wake you when I orter."

And then the hearty negress would sit through the long hours of the night, scarcely stirring, for fear of awaking her. As the solemn time went slowly by, the devout soul was almost constantly sending up petitions to the only Ear that could hear them—praying for her mistress, for her "baby boy" Pomp, for Colonel Mulford, and lastly for herself, and for guidance to their distant home.

"Oh Lord, send us some good friends, dat will help us git out ob dis bad country. Hullo!"

Surely she heard the tramp of the horses' feet. Yes ; the Indians are coming again. She arouses Olive, and both spring to their feet.

Too late ; they are surrounded. Polly and Olive both sink upon their knees ; they can do nothing but pray.

One of the horsemen dashes forward, and seems about to ride over them ; but he springs to the ground.

"Olive! Olive! don't you know me—Eugene Montrose?"

The half-fainting girl looks up wildly at the dark figure, and the next moment is clasped in his arms.

"And, oh golly gracious ! dar's my blessed old mommy !" yelled Pomp, as he flung both arms and legs around the good old soul, and almost hugged the life out of her. "Ain't glad to see yer, 'cause I know I'll git sumfin' to eat, sure."

And he squeezed her harder than ever.

"What's de matter, you big fool !" demanded Polly, as, getting one hand loose from the vise-like grasp of the baby, she gave him a sounding whack on the ears, followed by another.

"Bang away, mommy. I lub you more dan dinner," called out Pomp, hugging and almost smothering her with kisses.

Polly did bang away with such lusty vigor that Pomp was compelled to duck his head and get out of her reach.

"Dat's her!" he exclaimed, as soon as he reached a safe distance; "I know her by de slap. Dar ain't oder old woman in de United States of Africa dat can whack like her. She kin wear out de seat ob my trowserloons in five minutes, by de style ob her spankin'."

For a few moments Olive was speechless and helpless. The revulsion from despair to joyous hope was so great that she was totally overcome. Mentreose supported her head, and kissed the pale, white face again and again, calling her by name, until she came back to herself, and pronounced his name in return.

While this was going on, the Antelope was moving around, on the alert for signs of the Blackfeet. The trapper sat motionless on his horse, saying nothing, but watching the touching scene. Now and then his hand was drawn across his eyes, and one who stood near might have seen something sparkling on his cheek in the faint starlight.

"Skulp me! but it's thunderin' qua'r," he muttered, snuffing his nose as though troubled with a severe cold.

In a few moments a lull came upon this tempest of feeling. Mentreose and Olive talked together in low tones, and it required but a very few minutes for them to understand each other perfectly. In that time, they learned the principal history of each since their separation months before.

In the mean time the Antelope showed signs of uneasiness. He was riding back and forth on his horse, and looking impatiently at those who were still standing upon the ground. Finally he spoke to Burt.

"Yas; we must git out of this infarnal country. Come, folks, onter yer animals, fur the varmints are powerful clus."

"Blast it; I think it's time we hed supper," called out Pomp, very naturally in a ravenous state just then.

The trapper was about to make some rough reply, when Mentreose rode up beside him.

"Olive and her servant here have had nothing but a few berries to eat for several days; they must be starving."

"Skulp me, but I never thought of that!" exclaimed the trapper, considerably astonished; "howsumever, I allus make a practice to carry a cold lunch with me, when a fellow gits in such a scrape as this, and it's sure death to stop. Let

'em swaller that, and it'll do till we git a good chance to halt '

"Why didn't you give me some ob dat afore?" demanded the wrathful Pomp; "you knowed I was sufferin' drefful."

"Woof! you've 'nough fat on yer to keep yer a month. Ef we don't git a good chance to stop afore long, I'm goin' to shoot yer, and roast yer on the run, after we eat this yer lunch."

While speaking, Burt produced several slices of cold, well-cooked venison, which he handed to Mentreose, who hastened to divide it between Olive and Polly. The latter, as might be expected, gave the largest part of hers to Pomp, who devoured his with a huge appetite, and no compunctions of conscience, and looked wistfully for more. But Polly's affection did not prompt her to such self-denial, unless there was greater occasion for it, and so Pomp was obliged to content himself with only a half-peased appetite.

It so came about that the horses were comparatively fresh, and they galloped out from the wood at a good swinging gait, the Antelope, as usual, taking the lead, while the trapper came next. The direction was due south, the purpose being to get out of this rugged, broken country, so much haunted by the vengeful Blackfeet.

The night still remained clear and starlight, not a breath of wind blowing, while the atmosphere was sharp and frosty. Most of the party had ridden so much during the last few days (especially the females) that they were naturally tired, but they were able to stand much more before giving out entirely.

Over hills, and wooded ridges, through groves of timber, across streams and valleys, and level stretches of prairie, they continued hour after hour, the keen faculties of the Antelope leading him forward with the certainty of a blood-hound upon the trail. Never once did he pause in doubt or hesitation. He knew the route too well to deviate in the least, except when temporarily compelled to do so, by the natural obstacles that threw themselves across the track.

But there were two unto whom this long night-ride was memorable on account of its happiness. They had been separated long, and strange adventures had befallen Olive Mulford; but the all-merciful Providence who guides all our actions, had overruled every thing for their welfare, and here

they were together with every prospect of remaining so, and of reaching safety.

They rode as closely side by side as was possible, and they seemed never weary of talking. Montrose felt that he could thus ride on forever by the side of the fiery little mustang, when he carried his fascinating mistress.

In another way, Pomp was scarcely less pleased with the society, except now and then, when, by way of a reminder, Poily reached over and gave a resounding box upon his ears. She was a good, well-intentioned soul, and now and then she gave utterance to her gratitude, in the fervent way peculiar to her race, her not unmusical voice ringing out with strange power upon the still night-air.

“ De Lor’ he was unto me true,
He brought me all my trouble frough,
And when it comes my time to die,
He’ll take me to his home on high ;
Noah’s ark move it, move it, move it.
Children move it.”

The last two lines were repeated as a refrain to each verse, and occasionally Pomp joined in with her, although she cautioned him to “shet up,” unless he could sing more in tune.

All night long the ride continued, and when it was fairly light the Antelope halted, selecting for his camping-place the top of a high swell in the prairie, with a few stubby trees growing, without grass or water, and with scarcely any advantage except the one single one which decided the Blackfoot to select it.

Its elevated position enabled him and his party to command the approach from every direction, and consequently it would be impossible for any of the Indians to steal upon them unawares.

As the halt was intended to last but a short time, this was the first thing to be considered, and Burt Bunker complimented the wisdom of the Indian in doing as he had done.

“ No danger of the varmints droppin’ down on our heads hyar,” he remarked to Montrose, as they were dismounting.

At the hill-foot ran a small brook, sufficient to furnish all the water needed for the horses and for the use of the camp. There was good pasturage also, and quite a growth of cotton-

wood, the bark of which is in good repute as a means of fodder for the animals in crossing the plains.

All the horses were tethered at the base of the hill, and there the fire was kindled, so that, after all, the camp proper was there.

But while the preparations were going on, the Antelope remained on the hill-top, scanning the prairie in every direction, on the alert for his kindred, who, he believed, would soon be on the trail of the flying party.

Just before halting he had left his friends for a few minutes, and when he returned he bore the choicest steaks of a plump buffalo across the horse, and Polly was now busy in preparing their breakfast from this.

When it was all ready, he was summoned to come down and join them at the meal; but he waited until they had finished, and then making sure that no foe was in sight, he called to Pomp to come and take his place, while he ate his breakfast.

The negro promptly came to his side and promised to keep a good watch until his return, to do which he seated himself flat upon the ground, and stared hard in every direction.

When his meal was finished, the Antelope started up the hill again. The country was still so broken and interspersed by ridges and stretches of timber, that at several points his view was so shortened, that he had good reason to fear, while so stupid a sentinel as Pomp was on duty, if even for a few minutes only.

As he neared the top of the hill, he saw Pomp lying flat upon his side and motionless. The heart of the Blackfoot gave a thrill, as he suspected that the work of his kindred was manifest in the dead form of the African stretched out before him. It looked as if some stealthy red-skin had crawled up to Pomp and struck him from behind.

The Antelope looked stealthily about him. He had heard the treacherous shot from the ambush before, and he knew that if any of his own tribe or clan caught him in questionable company, they would spare him no quicker than they would spare them. It was his wish and purpose to conceal his identity from the Blackfeet, whenever he was exposed to their scrutiny, and to accomplish that end he had made several

important changes in his dress and appearance, and especially in the manner in which he placed the paint upon his face.

He walked very slowly up the hill, looking furtively about him, for he had no desire to run into any masked battery. Once or twice he was on the point of retreating to and alarming his friends—on their account more than his own—but he kept on up the hill until he reached the top.

Not a muscle of the negro stirred, but as the Indian gazed abruptly at him, he could detect a slight rising and falling of the chest, as though he were still breathing.

"Not dead, but nearly so," thought the Antelope, as he crept nearer.

Still advancing, like the crouching panther, he finally reached out his hand so that he could seize his shoulder and draw him over. As he did so he discovered that Pomp was not dead—but asleep!

"Black white man no good!" exclaimed the disgusted Blackfoot, as he gave the negro an impatient kick.

But the next instant he discovered that real danger threatened him and the little band under his care; for on the crest of the nearest hill he detected several small objects moving swiftly along, sometimes sinking out of sight and then coming to view at some other point further away.

The experienced eye of the Antelope told him at once that these were the tufted heads of so many Blackfeet, who were riding along on the other side of the crest a short distance from the top. They undoubtedly belonged to the party of pursuers, who had learned where the fugitives were.

The Antelope at once descended his side of the hill, until certain of not being seen by his kindred, when he ordered Pomp to return to his mother, and beckoned to Burt Bunke, to approach.

It required but a moment for the trapper to get an accurate idea of the situation of affairs.

"Yas; they're thar, and they're yender too," he replied, as he pointed to a hill, nearly in an opposite direction from the first, and looking there, these two veteran hunters saw unmistakable "signs" of their enemies in that place.

"The fact of it is," added the trapper, as indifferently as if he were discussing the number of peltries he expected to take

during the season, "if I ain't powerful mistook, we're surrounded, and we'll never git out of this muss without the hottest kind of a fight."

"Dat's so," assented the Antelope, with considerable uneasiness in his manner.

CHAPTER XI.

AT BAY.

HAD there been no females in the party, the fugitives would have had no hesitation as to the course for them to follow.

Although literally surrounded by the Blackfeet, they would have made a dash through them, even though at the risk of losing one or two lives, and of being dismounted by the shooting of their horses.

But the presence of Olive and her servant precluded all thought of such a course, and it only remained for them to fortify themselves, and take all precautions against an assault until they could reconnoiter and obtain a correct idea of the strength and intentions of their enemies.

While, therefore, the Antelope maintained his watch, the others came to the top of the hill, and the men began rolling the large stones in a sort of circle, behind which the women were placed, with warnings against exposing themselves to the Indians' bullets, which doubtless would be soon flying about their heads.

Under strong and willing arms, it was but a short time before the fortifications were complete. All that remained of the cooked buffalo was brought within the "fort," together with such water as they were able to hold in their vessels, and then they were in a condition to stand a siege of several days' duration, beyond which no one suspected it could possibly last.

The horses were allowed to remain tethered at the bottom of the hill, where they were considered as safe from the Blackfeet as it was possible for them to be. They could only be stampeded by their foes exposing themselves to the rifles of

those on the hill, who would be noways chary about protecting such valuable property from such treacherous foes.

The fear of the trapper was that instead of stampeding, they would attempt to shoot their horses; but to do this, they could scarcely avoid exposing themselves to the same danger from the fugitives.

While all these preparations were making, the Blackfeet scarcely showed themselves. Only now and then could a glimpse of their topknots be caught as they circled back and forth on the opposite side of the hill: it was evident that they had a healthy fear of the rifles of the white men.

Every thing being ready, it only remained for our friends to watch and wait. Pomp had scarcely finished his share of the work, when he was sound asleep, with his head in the lap of his mother, who, poor soul, gave way to the sound slumber of which she had been deprived for so long a time.

Olive Mulford was thoughtful and anxious. The knowledge of what Eugene Mentreose had chivalrously undergone for her sake, sealed the attachment she had long felt toward him, into a deep, all-pervading and pure love, such as would have made it a pleasure to die for him; and, as it is true that the object which we have sought to benefit and protect becomes, thereby, the more endeared to us, so our hero felt the same self-sacrificing devotion toward the beautiful and peerless girl, who now, more than ever, was dependent upon his courage and skill in defending her against the ruthless Blackfeet, pursuing her with a persistency of enmity that seemingly would not be denied.

"Why so sad?" he asked, when, their active work ceased, he found occasion to sit down for a word or two with her.

She smiled and made a manifest effort to cast off her gloom, but failed.

"I do not know; but I have a presentiment that one of us will never get away from this place," she replied, vainly striving to keep back her tears.

Mentreose laughed, for he was really in the best of spirits.

"You have been under such excitement, that this is but the natural reaction; you will soon feel different. Don't allow yourself to give way to such fancies."

"I have done my best to overcome them, but I can not."

" You are wearied out, as any man would be," said he, fondly kissing her forehead. " Wrap this blanket about you and secure some sleep while the opportunity is given you."

She protested that she had no desire, but consented, to please him, and he was wiser than she ; for in a few minutes he saw that she had sunk into a quiet, refreshing slumber.

" Poor, persecuted one," he mused, as he looked affectionately upon the pale, sweet face. " You have suffered a great deal, but you are near your rest."

As he uttered this, a chill went through his heart, as he recalled the foreboding words he had uttered, so different from the meaning he intended to express.

" It can not be," he thought, with a heavy sadness upon his heart " that there is any thing to come from such gloomy thoughts. It is but natural that her spirits should be depressed, after such an experience as she has endured."

He moved away, but, as he did so, he was conscious that the same dark shadow was thrown across his path ; the same chilling atmosphere that had enwrapped her had dropped about him,—and it seemed a Shadow whose name was Death.

Several hours passed, without any thing additional being seen of the Blackfeet. Indeed, they scarcely showed themselves at all.

" What do you suppose they are waiting for ?" asked Mentreose of the trapper, who was seated on one of the large stones, quite moody and sullen.

" Night," was the reply.

" Ah ! I see it will be more favorable to them. Do you think that we shall be left undisturbed until then ?"

" Can't say," replied Burt, who experienced a strange melting influence, when face to face with the young man. " Skulp me, but it's hard to understand all the ways and devilments of the varmints. I've had business dealin's with these Blackfeet, off and on, fur the last thirty years, and thar be some things about 'em that I don't yet understand by no means."

" Have you any idea of their number, Burt ?"

" I guess it's something like a dozen, but it mought be thar's double that, 'cause I guess only from what I've see'd with my own eyes."

" How are we going to find out ?"

"The Antelope thar will soon learn. He's waitin' fur a chance to crawl out—but I don't b'lieve he'll git it afore dark."

At this juncture, Pomp awoke, and rising to his feet, began to yawn and stretch himself, all-unmindful of the danger in doing so. Mentreose was about to remind him of his peril, when *crack* went a rifle, and the bullet missed his eyes by scarce a hair's breadth.

"Golly! somebody's careless wid dar blasted guns!" exclaimed the darky, as he quickly dropped out of sight.

Scarcely had the sound of the Indian's rifle died away, when that of the trapper was discharged. He had seen the small wreath of thin blue smoke curling upward from the adjacent hill, and had caught a glimpse of the bronzed head of the red-skin at the same moment. With lightning-like quickness, his rifle was at his shoulder, aimed and fired.

The aim was unerring, and the bullet crashed through the brain of the Blackfoot, who gave utterance to his ear-splitting shriek, threw up his arms, and fell over dead on the instant.

During all this time, the fugitives—with the exception noted—carefully screened their bodies from observation. The bowlders were so arranged that they could command every point from which it was possible for the Indians to attack them, and it was out of the question for any of them to attempt any scheme that would escape the scrutiny of Burt Bunker and the Antelope.

More than once, Eugene Mentreose, suddenly turning his head, found the eyes of the trapper fixed upon him with a curious intensity that caused him to wonder and feel some uneasiness, for he had no suspicion of what it meant.

At the same time, independent of this, he was sensible of a singular emotion upon his own part. When he looked at the scarred and grizzled face, it seemed to him that there was something in it which bore a familiar appearance—faint, but none the less real, although it was so intangible that he could not seize and hold it.

"I have seen it before," Eugene had said to himself a dozen times; "but when, where, under what circumstances?"

Again and again he asked himself the question, but was

unable to answer, and finally came to the conclusion that he must have been in the mystical region of dreamland, although even this explanation only partially satisfied him.

As the afternoon waned away, those within the fortifications partook sparingly of the food.

"Don't see de use ob lebing any ob it," growled Pomp, when informed that he had all of his stipend. "Ef I don't eat no more, I'll be hungry now and hungry to-morrer, and dat's de way it will be wid all ob yer."

But this original reasoning convinced no one but himself, and secured no more food for him on that day.

It was hardly dark, when the Antelope managed to steal over the ridge unobserved by the enemy. No one but he could have accomplished such a feat, but he did it so well that he returned at the end of half an hour, having succeeded in making a complete reconnoissance.

He brought back unpleasant tidings. Instead of a dozen or twice as many, there were full fifty Blackfoot Indians surrounding the little band of fugitives. All were well-mounted, as a matter of course, and well-armed, and the situation of our friends was critical in the extreme.

The question now was whether these Blackfeet intended to make an assault during the night, or simply to wait until the defenders should be starved into submission.

It looked as if the merciless red-skins had their choice of either method, and that either would be equally effective.

"Thar ain't nothin' too bad that yer kin say about the varmints," remarked the trapper, as he sat apart, conversing in a low tone with Mentreose, "but, skulp me ef thar ain't one thing yer can't call 'em and tell the truth."

"What's that?"

"Cowards."

"If the Antelope is a specimen they are as brave as men can be," said our hero, in the same low, cautious voice, taking care that Olive, who was wide awake now, should not overhear them.

"He ain't no braver than the rest of 'em. I've crossed knives with lots of 'em, and old Betsey Jane has barked at as many more, and I never yet met the one that war a coward."

"Then it looks as if they would attack us."

"Dunno," returned the trapper, thoughtfully. "I think it ruther looks the other way, and I see the reason."

"What is it?"

"Them varmints are arter the gal thar, and they want her alive and well and not dead."

"God forbid!" exclaimed Mentreose, glancing toward Olive, who could be seen a short distance away conversing earnestly with Polly Brown, and all unsuspicuous of the words that had just been uttered. "That must never be, Burt. Promise me that you will help me to defend her."

The trapper turned his grizzled face wonderingly upon the excited young man, as if he did not understand him.

"What do yer mean?"

"Forgive me, but you do not know how I feel, Burt, in this matter. I could never live if she should fall into their hands again."

"*She ain't a-gwine to do it!*" said Burt Bunker, in a voice that was low, but terrible in its earnestness.

Mentreose waited for him to say more by way of explanation, but he did not, and he could only surmise the truth, and in doing so he only partially guessed it; for the trapper not only meant he would stand by her so long as any hope remained, but he meant still further, that if the moment did come when the fair girl could no longer be kept out of their hands, then would he turn and deliberately shoot her through the heart! She had been treated leniently so far, when in the hands of her captors, but only because they chose to wait until she was domiciled among them as a Blackfoot squaw. The experienced hunter was thankful that she had been saved thus far, but he had resolved that the fifty howling wretches should never lay hands upon her again, *alive*, so long as he retained the power to aim his rifle and pull the trigger.

But there was no necessity for Mentreose knowing this, and so the trapper refrained from telling.

"I beg your forgiveness," added our hero, after a moment's pause, "for seeming to doubt you. I know you are true, but my anxiety overcame my judgment for the moment."

"It's all right," returned Burt, and then he seemed to relapse into a sad mood, so deep that he paid no attention to

several questions put to him by his young companion. The latter was about to move away to speak to Olive, when the trapper looked up with a curious suddenness.

"See hyar, will yer answer me two or three questions?"

"Any thing at all that I can answer I will do so."

Twice the hunter made as if to speak, but checked himself each time, while Mentrose awaited his words.

"I am waiting," he said, speaking gently, in the hope of encouraging him, but still he hesitated.

"No; wait till some other time."

"Why not now?" asked our hero, whose curiosity was not a little aroused.

"Ef both of us live to git out o' this muss, I'll tell yer the first good chance I git."

"But suppose one of us should get killed?"

"Then it can't make no difference. No; let it go fur the present, fur it's taking too much of our time now. We must look sharp, and not let a chance slip by, fur I kin tell yer, younker, we're in just as bad a fix as we kin be. Whar's the Antelope?" he asked, looking around.

"He is gone," replied Olive, who had overheard the question.

"Whar?"

"I don't know. I saw him crawl under that stone, or rather between the two, and that was the last of him."

"How long ago?"

"About half an hour."

"Qu'ar," muttered the trapper, who did not seem pleased with the information.

"Undoubtedly he is off on another reconnoissance," ventured Mentrose, but Burt shook his head.

"Not that; *it looks bad!*"

"What do you mean? Do you suspect him?" demanded his alarmed and amazed companion.

"I don't say, but remember this," replied the trapper, in his most impressive manner, "that red-skin has done us a good turn, and we all thank him; but he lives among his people, his squaw and pappooses are thar. He knows it won't do fur him to be catched in this muss."

"But his people know he is friendly to the whites."

"I know all that, and they don't care as long as he don't do too much of it, or cross thar path too often. It wouldn't be healthy fur him to be cotched inside of this ring, when the last tug comes, nor healthy fur his family either."

"Then you suspect that he has betrayed us?"

"No; he wouldn't do that; but he's found out thar's no hope fur us, so he's just crawled out and left to save himself and family, and I don't know as I blame him fur it, arter all."

CHAPTER XII.

FATHER AND SON.

TOWARD midnight the new moon came up, and this, added to the bright starlight and clear atmosphere, made objects visible for a considerable distance. The horses, tethered and now quietly lying down upon the ground, were plainly visible from the fort on top of the hill.

Burt Bunker's apprehension was that an attempt would be made to stampede or capture the animals, as it would look like quite an easy matter for an Indian to steal forward and cut the lariats, after which a slight effort would suffice to drive them beyond the reach of their owners.

Twice the trapper had detected the shadowy form of a Blackfoot slowly and stealthily crawling over the ground toward the horses, and twice had he brought Betsey Jane to a level, and driven a bullet through the audacious red-skins.

This, united with his other shot, had served as a wholesome reminder of the vigilance of the fugitives, and of the risk incurred by any approach, however cautious, to their defenses.

Mentrose had spent an hour or two in converse with Olive, whose head was now in the lap of Polly—and both were asleep, Pomp himself wrapped up and unconscious upon the ground—so that the two white men were the only ones who were awake and on guard.

The absence of the Antelope caused our hero not a little

uneasiness. He could admit that he was justified in withdrawing as he did, but there was no denying that his course bore a cowardly and unpleasant look.

Burt adhered to his opinion as expressed in the last chapter, and would not admit any other explanation, and Mentrose was compelled to confess its probability.

"It may be right—it may be right," he murmured to himself, "but I didn't expect it of the Antelope."

The trapper was moody and uncommunicative again. He resisted all efforts to open communication, and occupied himself solely in keeping guard over those who, by a singular concurrence of circumstances, were placed under his protection.

Again and again did the young man attempt to unravel that mysterious feeling that came over him when he gazed upon this hunter—to unravel that web whose woof seemed constantly dangling within his eager grasp, and yet always eluded it.

"Skulp me!"

What was it that caused this sudden exclamation upon the part of the trapper, and his springing to his feet? His companion heard and saw nothing unusual.

"What is it?" asked the latter.

"Thar's somethin' the matter over thar! Hark!"

A tread of many horses, as if rushing to and fro, was heard. It came from the other side of the hill, where all the Blackfeet evidently had gathered.

"They are going to attack us."

"Hark ag'in!"

Crack, crack, bang, bang, went gun after gun, and war-shouts were mingled with the increasing fray. There was a fight going on—a fight between the Blackfeet and an attacking party of white men.

The next instant Eugene Mentrose threw his hat high in air, danced hither and thither, and shouted in a voice that awoke all about him:

"Saved! saved! saved!"

"Yer right, and it's the work of the Antelope," responded the trapper, as his face was overspread by a huge grin.

"Where now are all your gloomy presentiments?" demanded our hero, as he caught our heroine in his arms, and

threatened to press the life out of her, covering her with kisses and dancing with joy.

"But who are our rescuers?" she asked, still hesitating to accept the joyful truth.

"COLONEL MULFORD AND HIS MEN!" shouted Burt Bunker, as he caught sight of an officer, followed by a dozen men thundering down the hillside. Straight onward dashed the leader, and leaping from his horse, sprung among the fugitives.

"My daughter! my daughter! Olive, where are you?"

"Here, dear father!" was the reply, as she threw herself in his arms.

The confusion soon quieted down and then the tale was told.

When Colonel Mulford started eastward, in obedience to his dispatches from Washington, he was met on the border by counter-dispatches, directing him to return, and he forthwith started with his small escort. He had gone but a short distance, when he encountered a party of hunters, direct from the Beaver River Agency, who informed him of the abduction of his daughter by the Blackfeet, and volunteered to accompany him on an expedition for her rescue.

There was little time lost by these prairie coursers as they sped over the plains toward the Blackfoot country. The experienced hunters of the party detected the presence of the Indians before the latter saw them, but they could hardly have a suspicion of the truth.

They halted, and as several of the number were preparing to move forward upon a reconnoissance, the Antelope appeared among them, and speedily made known the true state of affairs.

For the safety of the friendly Blackfoot, whose position was understood by Colonel Mulford, it was arranged that he should move forward with them, but somewhat in advance, and by apprising his people of their coming, win for himself their confidence, and, at the same time, really befriend the fugitives.

The scheme succeeded to a charm. The announcement of the Antelope was followed by the resistless charge of the bordermen, and the scattering of the Blackfeet to the winds, and among them went the Antelope, and kept with them until he rejoined his family among the mountains of the North-west.

The party remained where they were until daylight, when

the homeward march was resumed, and two days later they safely reached the fort at the Beaver River Agency. Here the trappers and hunters took their departure, but not until each had received a handsome present from Colonel Mulford, who felt he could never repay them for the service they had done him, in the recapture of his beloved daughter from the power of the Blackfeet.

On the day succeeding the arrival of our friends at the Beaver River Agency, two horsemen rode out from it, side by side. They continued at an easy gallop until they had passed over a large swell that shut them out from the view of any who might be curious, and there they reined up, and dismounting from their horses, stood face to face.

They were Burt Bunker, the trapper, and Eugene Mentreose.

"I've brought yer hyar," began the trapper, "'cause I don't want no one else to hear what we've got to say. Be yer now ready to answer the questions that I want to ax yer?"

"More than ready."

"Is yer real name Eugene Mint Rose?"

The young man started.

"What reason have you for asking *that*?"

"Yer promised to answer me."

"No; it is not."

"What mought it be?"

Eugene hesitated; he certainly had no anticipation of any such questioning as this, when he gave his promise; but the trapper said nothing and did nothing but calmly to await the expected reply.

"My name is Eugene Wentworth."

"WHAT!" exclaimed the trapper, in great amazement, and with no little excitement.

"Yes; that is my real name. When I was baptized, my friend had the name Eugene Mentreose Wentworth given me."

"Why have yer called yerself, then, by t'other handle?"

"Mentreose was his name, and it was given out of compliment to him. He was the brother of my mother, who died before I can remember."

"Yes; and what else?" said Burt, vainly seeking to repress his great excitement.

"He was a merchant in Cincinnati, and made me his junior partner when I became old enough. He requested me to wear his name, until I should find my real father; but, as there is little prospect of that, it looks as though I am to be known as Mentreose for a long time."

"Did he ever tell yer any thing 'bout yer dad?"

The young man lowered his head as if in meditation.

"I can not recall any thing of any account; but, somehow or other, I gathered the idea that he was dead."

"Wal, he isn't."

"How do you know?"

"'Cause he stands afore yer!"

It is not often that a man is rocked and swayed by such a very earthquake of emotion as was the trapper. Hitherto he had stood stationary, the master of himself, but now the emotion mastered him. He was shaking like a leaf in the tempest, while his cheeks and beard were bedewed with tears, such as had not flowed like that for years. Indeed, it looked for a few moments as if he would fall to the ground from very weakness.

And his comrade was equally agitated, although in a different way. He sat staring and straining his eyes, as if he failed to comprehend the words that had been uttered; but now the meaning of that dim, familiar look in the face of the trapper was explained. Surely he had seen him before, many long, long years ago, when, but an infant, he had been dandled upon that knee.

"FATHER!"

He pronounced the word, and then placing his arm over his neck, their tears flowed together.

It was a long time before it was all understood, but in time father and son gained the whole truth.

He who has figured in these pages as Burt Bunker was really Burtis Wentworth. When very young, he had formed a taste for hunting, and adopted the perilous life of a trapper. This he followed a number of years, until he came across a beautiful girl, living on the border, with whom he fell deeply in love, and who loved him as deeply and truly in return.

They were married, and for a year or two were as happy

as two mortals could be. Burt concluded to give over his wandering life, and settled down as a staid husband; but affliction came. Providence removed his wife, leaving him with but the infant boy, Eugene.

For a time he was like a man out of his mind, and then he suddenly disappeared with his child. No one knew where they were gone, and after a time he was forgotten except by a few of his intimate friends, who were never able to learn any thing regarding him.

But the stricken father had gone at his old business of trapping again, and, strange as it may seem, had taken his little child with him. No mother could have cared for it more tenderly than did he, and like the boy of the wild Indian, it grew and strengthened in the health-giving air of the mountains.

But the hand of affliction was upon the trapper, and one night, as he was encamped in the very grove where, years after, as we have related, he sat talking to the grown-up man, a party of Blackfeet rushed into the grove, fired upon him, and dashed away with the child.

When the trapper recovered his senses, it was morning, and he was wounded nigh unto death, and there were no signs of his darling boy. He had no wish to get well, but his hardy constitution brought him through, and in a few days he was almost as well as ever.

Then he took his horse, with the determination to follow his enemies to the death, but he soon lost the trail, and was thus deprived of *that* consolation.

Dating from this time, the nature of the man seemed to undergo a change. He became reticent and moody; he gave himself another name, that no one should recognize him as the once happy Burtis Wentworth, and spent his time in solitude. Only when compelled to do so did he visit the border, and then, as soon as he had disposed of his peltries, he was back again to the mountains.

During the warm season, when there was little or no trapping to be done, he occasionally appeared among the frontier settlements where he was unknown, and where he made certain that no one should know him.

In this manner some twenty odd years of his life passed

He never once entertained the thought that his boy was alive. It seemed incredible to him that a party of Indians would spare the life of a small child, when there was no parent with it to give it attention, and he would have died in the implicit belief that his child had long preceded him, but for the circumstances which have been narrated at length in the preceding pages.

The hand of Providence was visible throughout. The Blackfeet who attacked the trapper, and ran away with his child, were themselves attacked, three or four hours afterward, by a party of hunters returning to the States, who took the boy from them, carried it to St. Louis, where it fell into the hands of its own uncle, who made every effort to find its father, but failing to do so, took the boy to Cincinnati with him, educated him, and eventually made him his partner in business.

A handsome, kind-hearted, chivalrous, full-grown man thus came to the scarred and weather-beaten father the little boy that had been so ruthlessly torn from his arms years before, among the wild solitudes of the great North-west.

Eugene and Olive were united as man and wife, shortly after, and settled in the beautiful Queen City of the West, and the old hunter gave over his wanderings and made his home with them. There he lived until he had many bright grandchildren frolicking around him, and then he quietly passed away, to join his loved wife who had preceded him by so many years, and patiently to await the coming of the other loved ones, when He, in his own good time, should say, "It is enough; come up higher."

THE END.

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 555 Nat Wolfe. By Mrs. M. V. Victor. Ready November 6th.
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